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MY SHIPMATE LOUISE

CHAPTER I

DOWN CHANNEL

We had left Gravesend at four o'clock in the morning, and now, at half-past eight o'clock in the evening, we were off the South Foreland, the ship on a taut bowline heading on a due down Channel course.

It was a September night, with an edge of winter in the gusts and blasts which swept squall-like into the airy darkling hollows of the canvas. There was a full moon, small as a silver cannon-ball, with a tropical greenish tinge in its icy sparkling, and the scud came sweeping up over it in shreds and curls and feathers of vapour, sailing up dark from where the land of France was, and whitening out into a gossamer delicacy of tint as it soared into and fled through the central silver splendour. The weight of the whole range of Channel was in the run of the surge that flashed into masses of white water from the ponderous bow of the Indiaman as she stormed and crushed her way along, the tacks of her courses groaning to every windward roll, as though the clew of each sail were the hand of a giant seeking to uproot the massive iron bolt that confined the corner of the groaning cloths to the deck.

The towering foreland showed in a pale and windy heap on the starboard quarter. The land ran in a sort of elusive faintness along our beam, with the Dover lights hanging in the pallid shadow like a galaxy of fireflies: beyond them a sort of trembling nebulous sheen, marking Folkestone; and on high in the clear dusk over the quarter you saw the Foreland light like some wild and yellow star staring down upon the sea clear of the flight of the wing-like scud.

The ship was the *Countess Ida*, a well-known Indiaman of her day—now so long ago that it makes me feel as though I were two centuries old to be able to relate that I was a hearty young fellow in those times. She was bound to Bombay. Most of the passengers had come aboard at Gravesend, I amongst them; and

here we were now thrashing our way into the widening waters of the Channel, mighty thankful—those of us who were not sea-sick, I mean—that there had come a shift of wind when the southern limb of the Goodwin Sands was still abreast, to enable us to keep our anchors at the cathead and save us a heart-wearying spell of detention in the Downs.

The vessel looked noble by moonlight; she was showing a maintopgallant sail to the freshening wind, and the canvas soared to high aloft in shadowy spaces, which came and went in a kind of winking as the luminary leapt from the edge of the hurrying clouds into some little lagoon of soft indigo, flashing down a very rain of silver fires, till the long sparkling beam travelling over the foaming heads of the seas, like a spoke of a revolving wheel, was extinguished in a breath by the sweep of a body of vapour over the lovely planet. I stood at the rail that ran athwart the break of the poop, surveying this grand night-picture of the outward-bound Indiaman. From time to time there would be a roaring of water off her weather-bow, that glanced in the moonshine in a huge fountain of prismatic crystals. The figures of a couple of seamen keeping a lookout trudged the weather-side of the forecastle, their shadows at their feet starting out upon the white plank to some quick and brilliant hurl of moonlight, clear as a sketch in ink upon white paper. Amidships, forward, loomed up the big galley, with a huge long-boat stowed before it roofed with spare booms; on either hand rose the high bulwarks with three carronades of a side stealing out of the dusk between the tall defences of the ship like the shapes of beasts crouching to obtain a view of the sea through the port-holes. A red ray of light came aslant from the galley and touched with its rusty radiance a few links of the huge chain cable that was ranged along the decks, a coil of rope hanging upon a belaying pin, and a fragment of bulwarks stanchion. Now and again a seaman would pass through this light, the figure of him coming out red against the greenish silver in the atmosphere. A knot of passengers hung together close under the weather poop ladder, with a broad white space of the quarter-deck sloping from their feet to the lee waterways, whence at intervals there would come a sound of choking and gasping as the heave of the ship brought the dark Channel surge brimming to the scupper-holes. The growling hum of the voices of the men blended in a strange effect upon the ear with the shrill singing of the wind in the rigging and the ceaseless washing noises over the side and the long-drawn creaking sounds which arise from all parts of a ship struggling against a head sea under a press of canvas.

Aft on the poop where I was standing the vessel had something of a deserted look. The pilot had been dropped off Deal; the officer of the watch (the chief mate) was stumping the weather-side of the deck from the ladder to abreast of the foremost skylight; the dark figure of the captain swung in a sort of pendulum-tramping from the mizzen rigging to the grating abaft the wheel. Dim

as a distant firebrand over the port quarter, windily flickering upon the stretch of throbbing waters, shone the lantern of the lightship off the South Sand Head ; and it was odd to mark how it rose and fell upon the speeding night sky to the swift yet stately pitching of our ship, with the figure of the man at the helm somehow showing the vaguer for it, spite of the shining of the binnacle lamp flinging a little golden haze round about the compass stand, abaft which the shape of the fellow showed vague as the outline of a ghost.

Ha ! thought I, *this* is being at sea now indeed ! Why, though we were in narrow waters yet, there was such a note of ocean yearning in the thunderous wash of the weather billows sweeping along the bends that, but for the pale glimmer of the line of land trending away to starboard, I might easily have imagined the whole waters of the great Atlantic to be under our bow.

It was a bit chilly, and I caught myself hugging my peacoat to me with a half-formed resolution to make for my cabin, where there were yet some traps of mine remaining to be stowed away. But I lingered—lover of all sea-effects as I then was and still am —to watch a fine brig blowing past us along to the Downs, the strong wind gushing fair over her quarter, and her canvas rising in marble-like curves to the tiny royals ; every cloth glancing in pearl to the dance of the moon amongst the clouds, every rope upon her glistening out into silver wire, with the foam, white as sifted snow, lifting to her hawse-pipes to the clipper sheering of her keen stem, and not a light aboard of her but what was kindled by the luminary in the glass and brass about her decks as she went rolling past us delicate as a vision, pale as steam, yet of an exquisite grace as determinable as a piece of painting on ivory.

I walked aft to the companion hatch and entered the cuddy, or, as it is now called, the saloon. The apartment was the width of the ship, and was indeed a very splendid and spacious state-cabin, with a bulkhead at the extremity under the wheel, where the captain's bedroom was, and a berth alongside of it, where the skipper worked out his navigation along with the officers, and where the midshipmen went to school. There were also two berths right forward close against the entrance to the cuddy by way of the quarter-deck, occupied by the first and second mates ; otherwise, the interior was as clear as a ballroom, and it was like entering a brilliantly illuminated pavilion ashore to pass out of the windy dusk of the night and the flying moonshine of it into the soft brightness of oil-flames burning in handsome lamps of white and gleaming metal, duplicated by mirrors, with hand-paintings between and polished panels in which the radiance cloudily rippled. A long table went down the centre of this cuddy, and over it were the domes of the skylights, in which were many plants and flowers of beauty swinging in pots, and globes of fish and silver swinging trays. Right through the heart of the interior came the shaft of the mizzen-mast, rich with chiselled configurations, and of

a delicate hue ; a handsome piano stood lashed to the deck abaft the trunk of giant spar. The planks were finely carpeted, and sofas and arm-chairs ran the length of this glittering saloon on either side of it.

There were a few people assembled at the fore-end of the table as I made my way to the hatch whose wide steps led to the sleeping berths below. It was not hard to perceive that one of them was an East Indian military gentleman whose liver was on fire through years of curry. His white whiskers, of the wire-like inflexibility of a cat's, stood out on either side his lemon-coloured cheeks ; his little blood-shot eyes of indigo sparkled under overhanging brows where the hair lay thick like rolls of cotton-wool. This gentleman I knew to be Colonel Bannister, and as I cautiously made my way along—for the movements of the decks were staggering enough to oblige me to tread warily—I gathered that he was ridiculing the medical profession to Dr. Hemmeridge, the ship's surgeon, for its inability to prescribe for sea-sickness.

'It iss der nerves,' I heard a fat Dutch gentleman say—afterwards known to me as Peter Hemskirk, manager of a firm in Bombay.

'Nerves!' sneered the Colonel, with a glance at the Dutchman's waistcoat. 'Don't you know the difference between the nerves and the stomach, sir?'

'Same thing,' exclaimed Dr. Hemmeridge soothingly ; 'sea-sickness means the head, any way ; and pray, Colonel, what are the brains but——'

'Ha! ha!' roared the Colonel, interrupting him ; '*there* I have you. If it be the brains only which are affected, why, then, ha! ha! no wonder Mynheer here doesn't suffer, though it's his first voyage, he says.'

But my descent of the steps carried me out of earshot of this interesting talk. My cabin was well aft. There was a fairly wide corridor, and the berths were ranged on either hand of it. From some of them, as I made my way along, came in muffled sounds various notes of lamentation and suffering. A black woman, with a ring through her nose and her head draped in white, sat on the deck in front of the closed door of a berth, moaning in a sea-sick way over a baby that she rocked in her arms, and that was crying at the top of its pipes. The door of a cabin immediately opposite opened, and a young fellow with a ghastly face putting his head out exclaimed in accents strongly suggestive of nausea : 'I thay, confound it! thtop that noithe, will you? The rolling ith bad enough without *that* thindy. Thteward!' The ship gave a lurch, and he swung out, but instantly darted back again, being indeed but half-clothed : 'I thay, are *you* the thteward?'

'No,' said I. 'Keep on singing out. Somebody'll come to you.'

'Won't they thmother that woman?' he shouted, and he would have said more, but a sudden kickup of the ship slammed his cabin door for him, and the next moment my ear caught a sound that indicated too surely his rashness in leaving his bunk.

I entered my berth, and found the lamp alight in it, and the young gentleman who was to share the cabin with me sitting in his bedstead, that was above mine, dangling his legs over the edge of it, and gazing with a disordered countenance upon the deck. I had chatted with him during the afternoon and had learnt who he was. Indeed, his name was in big letters upon his portmanteau—'The Hon. Stephen Colledge'; and incidentally he had told me that he was a son of Lord Sandown, and that he was bound to India on a shooting tour. He was a good-looking young man, with fair whiskers, white teeth, a genial smile, yet with something of affectation in his way of speaking.

'It's doocid rough, isn't it, Mr. Dugdale?' said he; 'and isn't it raining?'

'No,' said I.

'Oh, but look at the glass here,' he exclaimed, indicating the scuttle or port-hole, the thick glass of which showed gleaming, but black as coal against the night outside.

'Why,' said I, 'the wet there is the sea; it is spray; nothing but spray.'

'Hang all waves!' he said in a low voice. 'Why the dickens can't the ocean always be calm? If I'd have known that this ship pitched so, I'd have waited for a steadier vessel. Will you do me the kindness to lift the lid of that portmanteau? You'll find a flask of brandy in it. Hang me if I like to move. Sorry now I didn't bring a cot, though they're doocid awkward things to get in and out of.'

I found the flask, and gave it to him, and he took a pull at it. I declined his offer of a dram, and went to work to stow away some odds and ends which were in my trunk.

'Don't you feel ill?' said he.

'No,' said I.

'Oh, ah, I remember now!' he exclaimed; 'you were a sailor once, weren't you?'

'Yes; I had a couple of years of it.'

'Wish *I'd* been a sailor, I know,' said he. 'I mean, after I'd given it up. As to *being* a sailor—merciful goodness! think of four, perhaps five months of *this*.'

'Oh, you'll be as good a sailor as ever a seaman amongst us in a day or two,' said I encouragingly.

'Don't feel like it now, though,' he exclaimed. 'Let's see: I think you said you were going out to do some painting?—Oh no! I beg pardon: it was a chap named Emmett who told me that. You—you——' He looked at me with a slightly inebriated cock of the head, from which I might infer that the 'pull' he had taken at his flask was by no means his first 'drain' within the hour.

'No,' said I, with a laugh; 'I am going out to see an old relative up country. And not more for that than for the fun of a voyage.'

'The *fun* of the voyage!' he echoed with a stupid face; then,

with a sudden brightening up of his manner, though his gloomy countenance quickly returned to him, he exclaimed, 'I say, Dugdale—beg pardon, you know; no good in *mistering* a chap that you're going to sleep with for four or five months—call me Colledge, old fellow—but I say, though, seen anything more of that ripping girl since dinner? By George! what eyes, eh?'

He drew his legs up, and with a slight groan composed himself in a posture for sleep, manifestly heedless of any answer I might make to his question.

I lingered awhile in the berth, and then filling a pipe, mounted to the saloon, and made my way to the quarter-deck to smoke in the shelter of the recess in the cuddy front. Colonel Bannister lay sprawling upon a sofa, holding a tumbler of brandy grog. There were other passengers in the cuddy, scattered, and all of them grimly silent, staring hard at the lamps, yet with something of vacancy in their regard, as though their thoughts were elsewhere. As I stepped on to the quarter-deck, the cries and chorusing of men aloft came sounding through the strong and hissing pouring of the wind between the masts and through the harsh seething of the seas, which the bows of the ship were smiting into snowstorms as she went sullenly ploughing through the water with the weather-leech of the maintopgallant-sail trembling in the green glancings of the moonlight like the fly of a flag in a breeze of wind. They were taking a reef in the fore and mizzen topsails. The chief mate, Mr. Prance, from time to time, would sing out an order over my head that was answered by a hoarse 'Ay, ay, sir,' echoing out of the gloom in which the fore-part of the ship was plunged. I lighted my pipe and sat myself down on the coamings of the booby hatch to enjoy a smoke. I was alone, and this moon-touched flying Channel night-scene carried my memory back to the times when I was a sailor, when I had paced the deck of such another vessel as this, as a midshipman of her. It seemed a long time ago, yet it was no more than six years either. The old professional instinct was quickened in me by the voices of the fellows aloft, till I felt as though it were my watch on deck, that I was skulking under the break of the poop here, and that I ought to be aloft jockeying a lee yardarm or dangling to windward on the Flemish horse.

Presently all was quiet on high, and by the windy sheen in the atmosphere, caused by the commingling of white waters and the frequent glance of the moon through some rent in the ragged scud, I could make out the figures of the fellows on the fore descending the shrouds. A little while afterwards a deep sea voice broke out into a strange wild song, that was caught up and re-echoed in a hurricane chorus by the tail of men hauling upon the halliards to masthead the yard. It was a proper sort of note to fit such a night as that. A minute after, a chorus of a like gruffness but of a different melody resounded on the poop, where they were mast-heading the topsail yard after reefing it. The combined notes flung a true oceanic character into the picture of the darkling

Indiaman swelling and rolling and pitching in floating launches through it, with her wide pinions rising in spaces of faintness to the scud, and the black lines of her royal yards sheering to and fro against the moon that, when she showed, seemed to reel amidst the rushing wings of vapour to the wild dance of our mastheads. The songs of the sailors, the clear, shrill whistling of a boatswain's mate forward, the orders uttered quickly by the chief officer, the washing noises of the creaming surges, the sullen shouting of the wind in the rigging, resembling the sulky breaker-like roar of a wood of tall trees swept by a gale—all this made one feel that one was at sea in earnest.

I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and went on to the poop. The land still showed very dimly to starboard, with here and there little oozings of dim radiance that might mark a village or a town. You could see to the horizon, where the water showed in a sort of greenish blackness with some speck of flame of a French light-house over the port quarter, and the September clouds soaring up off the edge of the sea like puffs and coils of smoke from a thousand factory chimneys down there, and now and again a bright star glancing out from amongst them as they came swiftly floating up to the moon, turning of a silvery white as they neared the glorious planet.

There were windows in the cuddy front, and as I glanced through one of them I saw the captain come down the companion steps into the brightly lighted saloon and seat himself at the table, where in a moment he was joined by the fiery-eyed little colonel. Decanters and glasses were placed by one of the stewards on a swing-tray, and the scene then had something of a homely look, spite of the cuddy's aspect of comparative desertion. Captain Keeling, I think, was about the most sailorly-looking man I ever remember meeting. I had heard of him ashore, and learnt that he had used the sea for upwards of forty-five years. He had served in every kind of craft, and had obtained great reputation amongst owners and underwriters for his defence and preservation of an Indiaman he was in command of that was attacked in the Bay of Bengal by a heavily-armed French picaroon full of men. Cups and swords and services of plate and purses of money were heaped upon him for his conduct in that affair; and indeed in his way he was a sort of small Commodore Dance.

I looked at him with some interest as he sat beside the colonel with the full light of the lamp over against him shining upon his face and figure. There had been little enough to see of him during the day, and it was not until we dropped the pilot that he showed himself. His countenance was crimsoned with long spells of tropic weather, and hardened into ruggedness like the face of a rock by the years of gales he had gone through. He was about sixty years of age; and his short-cropped hair was as white as silver, with a thin line of whisker of a like fleecy sort slanting from his ear to the middle of his cheek. His nose was shaped like the bowl of a clay

pipe, and was of a darker red than the rest of his face. His small sea-blue eyes were sunk deep, as though from the effect of long staring to windward; and, almost hidden as they were by the heavy ridge of silver eyebrow, they seemed to be no more than gimlet-holes in his head for the admission of light. He had thrown open his peacoat, and discovered a sort of uniform under it: a buff-coloured waistcoat with gilt buttons, an open frock-coat of blue cloth with velvet lapels. Around his neck was a satin stock, in which were three pins, connected by small chains. His shirt-collar was divided behind, and rose in two sharp points under his chin, which obliged him to keep his head erect in a quite military posture. Such was Captain Keeling, commander of the famous old Indiaman *Countess Ida*.

I guessed he would not remain long below, otherwise I should have been tempted to join him in a glass of grog, spite of the company of Colonel Bannister, who was hardly the sort of man to make one feel happy on such an occasion as the first night out at sea, with memory bitterly recent of leave-taking, of kisses, of the hand-shakes of folks one might never see again.

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH LUGGER

My pipe was out; the quarter-deck bulwarks hid the sea, and so I mounted the poop ladder to take a look round before turning in. Away to port, or *larboard*, as we then called it, was a full-rigged ship rolling up Channel under all plain sail, with such a smother of white yeast clouding her bows, and racing aft into the long line of her wake, which went glaring over the dark throbbing waters, that it made one think of the base of a waterspout writhing upwards to meet the descending tube of vapour. She was the first object that took my eye, and I hurriedly crossed the deck to view her. Mr. Prance, the chief mate, stood at the rail watching her.

'A noble sight!' said I.

'Yes, sir, an English frigate. A fifty-one gun vessel, apparently. Upon my word, nothing statelier ever swam, or ever again will swim, than ships of that kind. Look at the line of her batteries—black and white like the keys of a pianoforte! What squareness of yard, sir! Her main-royal should be as big as our top-gallantsail.'

He sent a look aloft at the reeling fabric over our heads, with a thoughful drag at a short growth of beard that curled upwards from his chin like the fore-thatch of a sou'-wester. The noble ship went floating out into the darkness astern, and her pale heights died upon the gloom like a burst of steam dissolving in the wind.

'What is that out yonder upon the starboard bow there, Mr. Prance?' said I.

He peered awhile, and said: 'Some craft reaching like ourselves—standing as we head—a lumpish thing anyhow. What a blot she makes, seeing that she has no height of spar!'

'We are overhauling her,' said I.

'Ay,' he answered, keeping his eyes fixed upon her. 'Doesn't she seem a bit uncertain, though?' he muttered, as if thinking aloud.

I had wonderfully good sight in those days, and after straining my eyes awhile against the heap of scarce determinable shadow which the craft made, I exclaimed: 'She'll be a French lugger, or I am greatly mistaken.'

'I believe you are right, sir,' answered the mate.

He drew a little away from me, as a hint, perhaps, that he desired to address his attention to the vessel on the bow, and suddenly putting his hand to his mouth, he hailed the forecastle in a sharp, clear note. An answer was returned swift as the tone of a bell to the blow of its tongue.

'Show a light forward! Smartly now! That chap ahead seems asleep.'

There were no side-lights in those days. Some long years were to elapse before the Shipping Act enforced the use of a night signal more to the point than a short flourish of the binnacle lamp over the side. In a few moments a large globular lantern in the grip of a seaman, whose figure showed like a sketch in phosphorus to the illumination of the flame, was rested upon the forecastle rail, with the night beyond him looking the blacker for the rising and falling point of fire. The hint seemed to be taken by the fellow ahead, and the mate walked aft to the binnacle, into which he stood looking, afterwards going to the rail, at which he lingered, staring forwards.

I crossed over to leeward to watch the milk-like race of waters along the side. The foam made a sort of twilight of its own in the air. Under the foot of the mainsail that was arched transversely across the deck, the wind stormed with a note of hurricane out of the huge concavity of the cloths, and made the rushing snow giddy with the whipping of it, till the eye reeled again to the sight of the yeasty boiling. Never did any ship raise such a smother about her as the *Countess Ida*. Our speed was scarce a full five miles, and yet, looking over to leeward, when the huge fabric came heeling down to her channels to the scud of a sea and to the weight of the wind in her canvas, you would have supposed her thundering through it a whole ten knots at least.

On a sudden there was a loud and fearful cry forward. 'Port your hellum! port your hellum!' I could hear a voice roaring out with a meaning as of life or death in the startling vehemence of the utterance.

'Starboard! starboard!' shouted Mr. Prance, who was still

standing aft. 'Over with it, men, for God's sake, before we are into her!'

Next instant there was a dull shock throughout the ship; a thrill that ran through her planks into the very soles of one's feet, while there arose shrieks and shouts as from three-score throats under the bows, and a most lamentable and terrifying noise of wood splintering, of canvas tearing, of liberated sails flogging the wind. I bounded to the weather rail, and saw a large hull of some eighty tons wholly dismasted—a wild scene of wreck and ruin to the flash of the moon at that moment shining down out of a clear space of sky—gliding past into our wake. The dark object seemed filled with men, and the yells left me in no doubt that she was a Frenchman—a large three-masted lugger, as I had supposed her.

In an instant our ship was in an uproar. There is nothing in language to express the noise and excitement. To begin with, our helm having been put down, we had come round into the wind, and lay pitching heavily, with sails slatting and thundering, yards creaking, rigging straining. The sailors rushed to and fro. All discipline for the moment seemed to have gone overboard. The captain had come tumbling up on deck, and was calling orders to the mate, who re-echoed them in loud bawlings to the quarter-deck and forecastle. Lanterns were got up and shown over the rail, and by the light of them you saw the figures of the seamen speeding from rope to rope and hauling upon the gear, their gruff, harsh chorusings rising high above the terrified chatter of the passengers—many of whom had rushed up on deck barely clothed—high also above the storming and shrilling of the wind, the deep notes of angry waters warring at our bows, and the distracting shaking and beating of the sails.

But a few orders delivered by Mr. Prance, whose tongue was as a trumpet in a moment like this, acted upon the ship as the sympathetic hand of a horseman upon a restive terrified thoroughbred.

'Haul up the mainsail—fore clew garnets—back maintopsail yard—tail on to the weather-braces and round in handsomely. Mr. Cocker (this was addressed to the second mate, who had tumbled up with the rest of the watch below on feeling the thump the *Countess Ida* had given herself, and on hearing the uproar that followed)—burn a flare—smartly, if you please! Also get blue-lights and rockets up.'

I ran aft to see if the vessel that we had wrecked was anywhere about. The moon was shining brilliantly down upon the sea at that time, and the swollen Channel waters were lifting their black heights into creaming peaks in an atmosphere of delicate silver haze, that yet suffered the eye to penetrate to the dark conlines of the horizon. The wake of the planet was a long throbbing fine of angry broken splendour in the south; but the tail of it seemed to stream fair to the point of sea into which the lugger had

veered, and I was confident that if she were afloat I should see her.

'Who is that to leeward there?' called the captain from the other side of the wheel in a tone of worry and irritation.

'Mr. Dugdale,' I replied.

'Oh, beg pardon, I'm sure,' he exclaimed; 'do you see anything of the vessel that we've run down?'

'Nothing,' I responded.

'She must have foundered,' said he; 'yet though I listened, I heard no cries after the wreck had once fairly settled away from us.'

Here the mate came aft hastily, and with a touch of his cap, reported that the well had been sounded, and that all was right with the ship.

'Very well, sir,' said the captain. 'I shall keep all fast with my boats. The calamity can't be helped. I'm not going to increase it by sacrificing my men's lives. The poor devils will have had a boat of their own, I suppose. Show blue-lights, will ye, Mr. Prance, and send a rocket up from time to time.'

They were burning a flare over the quarter-deck rail at that moment—some turpentine arrangement, that threw out a long flickering flame and a great coil of smoke from the yawning mouth of the tin funnel that contained the mixture. It was like watching the ship by sheet-lightning to see a large part of her amidships and her mainmast and the pale lights of the mainsail hanging from the yard in the grip of the gear—to see all this come and go as the flame leapt and faded. There was a crowd of terrified passengers on the poop, some of them ladies, hugging themselves in dressing-gowns and shawls; and out of the heart of the little mob rose the saw-like notes of Colonel Bannister.

'These collisions,' I heard him cry, 'never *can* take place if a proper lookout be kept. It is preposterous to argue. I'd compel the oldest seaman who contradicted me to eat his words. Why, have I been making the voyage to India four times——' But the rest of his observations were drowned in cries of astonishment and alarm from the ladies as a rocket, discharged close to them, went hissing and shearing up athwart the howling wind in a stream of fire, breaking on high into a blood-red ball, that floated swiftly landwards, like an electric meteor, ghastly against the moonshine, with a wide crimson atmosphere about it that tinctured the very scud. A moment after a blue-light was burnt over the side from the head of the poop ladder, whereat there was a general recoil and more shrill exclamations from the ladies. In fact, these wild mystical lights as it were coming on top of the fancy of men drowning astern, and colouring the ship with unearthly glares, and flinging a wonderful complexion of horror upon the night for a wide space round about the pitching and groaning Indiaman, put such an element of mystery and fear into the scene that though I was by no means a new hand at such sea-shows, I will own to shuddering again and yet again as I overhung the side of the poop,

striving to discern any object that might resemble a boat in the foam-whitened gloom into which the lugger had slided.

'What has happened? Everybody is so excited that one can't get at the real story.'

I turned quickly, and saw the tall figure of a lady at my side. She was habited in a cloak, the hood of which was over her head, and darkened her face almost to the concealment of it, saving her eyes, which shone large, liquid, with a clear red spot in the depths, from the reflection of the flare at the quarter-deck bulwark.

I briefly explained, lifting my cap as I gave her her name—Miss Temple—for I had particularly remarked her as she came aboard at Gravesend, and asked who she was, though I had seen nothing more of her down to that moment. I ended my account pointing to the quarter of the sea where the lugger had disappeared.

'Thanks for the story,' she exclaimed, with a sudden note of haughtiness in her voice, while she kept her eyes, of the rich blackness of the tropic night-sky, fixed firm and gleaming upon me, as though she had addressed me in error, and wanted to make sure of me. She moved as though she would walk off, paused, and said: 'Poor creatures! I hope they will be saved. Is our ship injured, do you know?'

'I believe not,' said I a little coldly. 'There may be a rope or two broken forward, perhaps, but there is nothing but the French lugger to be sorry for.'

'My aunt, Mrs. Radcliffe,' said she, 'has been rendered somewhat hysterical by the commotion on deck. She is too ill to leave her bed. I think I may reassure her?'

'Oh yes,' I exclaimed. 'But yonder, abreast of the wheel there, is the captain to confirm my words.'

She gave me a bow, or rather a curtsey of those days, and walked aft to address the captain, as I supposed. Instead, she descended the companion hatch, and I lost sight of her.

A disdainful lady, thought I, but a rare beauty too! marvellous eyes, anyhow, to behold by such an illumination as this of rockets and blue-lights, and flying moonshine, and the yellow glimmer of flare-tins.

All this while the ship lay hove to, her maintopsail to the mast, the folds of her hanging mainsail sending a low thunder into the wind as it shook its cloths, the seas breaking in stormy noises from her bow; but *now* there fell a dead silence upon the people along her decks: nothing broke this hush upon the life of the vessel, save the occasional harsh hissing rush of a rocket piercing the restless noises of the sea and the whistling of the wind in the rigging. The bulwark rail was lined with sailors, eagerly looking towards the tail of the misty wake of the moon, into which the black surges went shouldering and changing into troubled hills of dull silver. The captain and two of the mates stood aft, intently watching the water, often putting themselves into strained hearkening postures,

their hands to their ears. Most of the lady passengers went below, but not to bed, for you could catch a sight of them through the skylight seated at the table talking swiftly, often directing anxious glances at the window-glass through which you could see them. There was one majestic old lady amongst them with grey hair that looked to be powdered, a hawk's-bill nose, an immense bosom, that started immediately from under her chin. The lamplight flashed in diamonds in her ears, and in rubies and in stones of value and beauty upon her fingers. She was Colonel Bannister's wife, and was apparently not wanting in her husband's fiery energy and capacity of taking peppery views of things, if I might judge by her vehement nods, and the glances she shot around her from her grey eyes. It was a cabin picture I caught but a glimpse of as I crossed the deck to take a look to leeward, but one, somehow, that sunk into my memory, maybe because of the magic-lantern-like look of the interior, with its brilliant lamps and many-coloured attire of the ladies in their shawls, dressing-gowns, and what not—standing out upon the eye amidst the wild dark frame of the seething, clamorous night.

All at once there was a loud cry. I rushed back to the weather rail.

'There's a boat heading for us, sir—see her, sir? Away yonder, this side o' the tumble of the moon's reflection!'

'Ay, there she is! It'll be the lugger's boat. God, how she dives!'

Twenty shadowy arms pointed in the direction which had been indicated by the gruff, grumbling cries of the sailors. The second mate, Mr. Cocker, came hastily forward to the break of the poop.

'Stand by, some of you,' he shouted, 'to heave them the end of a line. Make ready with bowlines to help them over the side.'

I could see the boat clearly now as she rose to the height of a sea, her black wet side sparkling out an instant to the moonlight ere she sank out of sight past the ivory-white head of the surge sweeping under her. She seemed to be deep with men; but I could count only two oars. She was rushed down upon us by the impulse of the sea and wind, and I felt my heart stand still as she drove bow on into us, whirling round alongside in a manner to make you look for the wreck of her in staves washing away under our counter. She was full of people, with women amongst them—poor creatures in great white caps and long golden earrings, the men for the most part in huge fishermen's boots, and tasselled caps and jerseys that might have been of any colour in that light. One could just make these features out, but no more, for the contents of the boat as it rose soaring and falling alongside were but a dark huddle of human shapes, writhing and twisting like a mass of worms in a pot, vociferating to us in the scarce intelligible *patois* of Gravelines or Calais or Boulogne.

There was no magic in the commands even of British officers to British sailors to put the least element of calm into the business.

It was not only that at one moment the boat alongside seemed to be hove up to the Indiaman's covering-board and that at the next she was rushing down into a chasm that laid bare many feet of the big ship's yellow sheathing: there was the dreadful expectation of the whole of the human freight being overset and drowning alongside in a breath; there were the heart-rending shouts of the distracted people; there was the total inability of captain and mates to make themselves understood. How it was managed I will not pretend to explain. By some means the boat was dragged to the gangway, grinding and thumping herself horribly against the Indiaman's rolling, stooping, massive side; then bowlines and ropes in plenty were dangled over or flung into her; and through the unshipped gangway, illuminated by half-a-dozen lanterns, and crowded by a hustling mob of sailors and passengers, one after another, the women and the men—most of the men coming first!—were dragged inboards, some of them falling flat upon the deck, some dropping on their knees and crossing themselves; a few of the women weeping passionately, one of them sobbing in dreadful paroxysms, the others mute as statues, as though terror and the presence of death had frozen the lifeblood in them and arrested the very beating of their hearts. Two of them fell into the sea; but they had lines about them and were dragged up half dead. They were all of them dripping wet, the men's sea-boots full of water; whilst the soaked gowns of the women flooded the deck on which they stood, as though several buckets of brine had been capsized there.

Old Keeling's pity for them would not go to the length of introducing the wretched creatures into the cuddy, to spoil the ship's fine carpets and stain and ruin the coverings of the couches. They were accordingly brought together in the recess under the break of the poop, where at all events they were sheltered. Hot spirits and water were given to them along with bread and meat, and this supper the unhappy creatures ate by the light of the dimly-burning lanterns held by the sailors.

There never was an odder, wilder sight than the picture the poor half-drowned creatures made. Some of the women scarcely once intermitted their sobs and lamentations, save when they silenced their throats by a mouthful of food or drink. They were very ugly, dark as coffee; and their black wet hair streaming like sea-weed upon their shoulders and brows from under their soaked caps made them look like witches. The men talked hoarsely and eagerly with many passionate gestures, which suggested fierce denunciation. The mate coming down to the booby hatch around which these people were squatting, eating, drinking, moaning, and jabbering without the least regard to the crowd of curious eyes which inspected them from the quarter-deck—the mate, I say, coming down, stood looking a minute at them, and then sent a glance round, and seeing me, asked if I spoke French.

'Yes,' said I; 'but not such French as those people are talking.'

'We have three passengers,' said he, 'who, I am told, are scholars in that language; but the steward informs me they're too seasick to come on deck. Just ask these people in such French as you have, if their captain's amongst them.'

As he said this, a little old man seated on the hatch-coaming, with a red nightcap on, immense earrings, and a face of leather puckered into a thousand wrinkles like the grin of a monkey, looked up at Mr. Prance, and nodding with frightful energy whilst he struck his bosom with his clenched fist, cried out: 'Yash, yash, me capitaine.'

'Ha!' said the mate, 'do you speak English, then?'

'Yash, yash,' he roared; 'me speakee Angleesh.'

Happily he knew enough to save me the labour of interpreting; and *labour* it would have been with a vengeance, since, though it was perfectly certain none amongst them, saving the little monkey-faced man, comprehended a syllable of the mate's questions, every time the small withered chap answered—which he did with extraordinary convulsions and a vast variety of frantic gesticulations—all the rest of them broke into speech, the women joining in, and there was such a hubbub of tongues that not an inch of idea could I have got out of the distracting row. However, in course of time the leathery manikin who called himself captain made Mr. Prance understand that the lugger belonged to Boulogne; that she had the survivors of another lugger on board, making some thirty-four souls in all, men and women, at the time of the collision, of which seventeen or eighteen were drowned. After he had given Mr. Prance these figures, he turned to the others and said something in a shrill, fierce, rapid voice, whereat the women fell to shrieking and weeping, whilst many of the men tore their hair, some going the length of knocking their heads against the cuddy front. It was a sight to sicken the heart, the more, I think, for the unutterable element of grotesque farce imported into that dismal tragedy by their countenances, postures, and behaviour; and having heard and seen enough, I slipped away on to the poop, with a chill coming into my very soul to the thought of the drowned bodies out yonder when my eye went to the sea weltering black to the troubled line of moonshine, and heaving in ashen, luminous billows in that chill path of light.

But long before this, our rockets, blue-lights, and flares had been seen; and a moment or two after I had gained the poop I spied the figure of Captain Keeling with a few male passengers at his side standing at the rail watching a powerful cutter thrashing through it to us close-hauled, with the water boiling to her leaps, and her big mainsail to midway high dark with the saturation of the flying brine. In less than twenty minutes she was rising and falling buoyant as a seabird abreast of us, with a shadowy figure at her lee rail bawling with lungs of brass to know what was wrong.

'I have run down a French lugger,' shouted Captain Keeling,

'and have half her people on board, and must put them ashore at once, for I wish to proceed.'

'Right y'are,' came from the cutter; but with a note of irritation and disappointment in the cry, as I could not but fancy.

Then followed some wonderful manœuvring. There was only one way of trans-shipping the miserable French people, and that was by a yardarm whip and a big basket. Hands sprang aloft to prepare the necessary tackle; Prance meanwhile, from the head of the poop ladder, thundered the intentions of the Indiaman through a speaking-trumpet to the cutter. I could see old Keeling stamp from time to time with impatience as he broke away from the questions of the passengers, one of whom was Colonel Bannister, into a sharp walk full of grief and irritability. Meanwhile they had shifted their helm aboard the cutter and got way upon the fine little craft. I saw her take the weight of the wind and heel down to the line of her gunwale, then break a dark sea into boiling milk, leaping the liquid acclivity as a horse takes a tall gate, burying herself nose under with the downwards launching rush, then soaring again to the height of the next billow with full way upon her. She came tearing and hissing through it as though her coppered forefoot were of red-hot metal, and when abreast of our lee quarter, put her helm down, and swept with marvellous grace and precision to alongside of us, clear of our shearing spars, and there she lay.

It was hard upon midnight when the last basket-load had been lowered on to her deck. There was no hitch; all went well; a line attached to the basket enabled the cutter's people to haul it fair to their decks; but the terror of the unfortunate Frenchmen was painful to see. The women got into the basket bravely; but many of the men blankly refused to enter, and had to be stowed in it by force, our Jacks holding on till the order to 'sway away' was given, when up would go poor Crapaud shrieking vengeance upon us all, and calling upon the Virgin and saints for help. In its way it was like a little engagement with an enemy. Some of the Frenchmen drew knives, and had to be knocked down.

Then, when the last of them was swayed over the side and lowered—'Are you all right?' shouted Captain Keeling to the cutter.

'All right,' responded a deep voice, hoarse with rum and weather. 'I suppose your owners 'll make the job worth something to us?'

'Ay, ay,' answered the captain. 'Round with your topsail yard, Mr. Prance. Lively now! this business has cost us half a night as it is.'

In a few minutes the great yards on the main were swung slowly to the drag of the braces with loud heave-yeos from the sailors, and the ship, feeling the weight of the wind in the vast dim hollow of the topsail, leaned with a new impulse of life in her frame and drove half an acre of foam ahead of her. We had

resumed our voyage; and with a sense of supreme weariness in me following the excitement of the hours, and chilled to the marrow by my long spell on deck and incessant loiterings in the keen night-wind, I entered the saloon, called for a tumbler of grog, and made my way to my berth.

CHAPTER III

MY FELLOW-PASSENGERS

It blew a hard breeze of wind that night. Soon after I had left the deck they furled the mainsail and topgallantsail, reefed the maintopsail, and tied another reef in the mizzentopsail. In fact, it looked as if we were to have a black gale of wind, dead on end too, with a sure prospect then of bearing up for the Downs afresh. How it may be in these steamboat times, I will not pretend to say; but my experience of the old sailing-ship is that the first night out, let the weather be what it will, is, on the whole, about as wretched a time as a man at any period of his life has to pass through.

Mr. Colledge was sound asleep in his bunk, his brandy flask within convenient reach of his hand. It was certain enough that he had heard nothing of the disturbance on deck. I undressed and rolled into my bed, and there lay wide awake for a long time. The ship creaked like a cradle. The full dismalness of a first night out was upon me, and it was made weightier yet—how much weightier indeed!—by the recollection of the wild and sudden tragedy of the evening. Oh, the insufferable weariness of the noises, the straining of the bulkheads, the yearning roar of the dark serge washing the port-hole, with the boiling of it dying out into a dim simmering upon the wind, the instant stagger of the ship to the blow of some heavy sea full on her bow, the sensation of breathless descent as the vessel chopped down with a huge heave to windward into the trough, the pendulum swing of one's wearing apparel hanging against the bulkhead, the half-stifled exclamations breaking from adjacent cabins, the whole improved into a true oceanic flavour by the occasional hoarse songs of the sailors above, faintly heard, as though you were in a vault, and that strange vibratory humming which the wind makes to one hearkening to it out of the cabin of a ship.

I fell asleep at last, and was awakened at half-past seven by the steward, who wished to know if I wanted hot water to shave with. The moment I had my consciousness, I was sensible that a heavy sea was running.

'No shaving this morning, thank you,' said I, 'unless I have a mind to slice the nose off my face. How's the weather, steward?'

'Blowing a buster from the south'ard, sir,' he answered, talking

with his lips at the venetian of the closed door, 'and the ship going along 'andsomely as a roll of smoke.'

Here somebody called him, and he trotted away.

Mr. Colledge awoke. 'By George!' he exclaimed, 'I've had a doocid long sleep.'

'How d'ye feel?' said I.

'In no humour to rise,' he answered. 'I suppose I can have what breakfast I'm likely to eat brought to me here?'

'Bless you, yes,' I answered.

'Any news, Mr. Dugdale?' he asked, his voice beginning to languish as a sensation of nausea grew upon him with the larger awakening of his faculties.

'We ran down a French lugger last night,' said I, 'and drowned a lot of men. That's all.'

He eyed me dully, thinking perhaps that I was joking, and then said: 'Well, there it is, you see. Yesterday you were talking of the fun of a voyage; and the very earliest of the humours is the drowning of a lot of men.'

'And women,' said I.

'Poor devils!' he exclaimed. 'Will you hand me a bottle of Hungary water that you'll find in my portmanteau? Much obliged to you, Dugdale: and will you kindly tell the steward as you pass through the cabin to bring me a cup of tea?'

'Get up by-and-by, if you feel equal to it,' said I. 'Nursing sea-sickness only makes the demon more pitiless. Show yourself on deck, and the wind'll blow the nausea out of you. And I'll tell you a better cure than Hungary water or brandy flasks—a cube of salt-horse, Colledge; a hearty lump of marine beef, something to work up the muscles of your jaws, and to sharpen your teeth for you.'

'Oh gracious, my dear fellow—don't,' he exclaimed, turning his face to the wall of the ship; and I heard him exclaim, as though muttering to himself: 'How the water gurgles about this window, and what a doocid sickly green it is!'

But a very few of us assembled at the breakfast table. Colonel Bannister was there, a very ramrod of a man, with a Bengal-tigerish expression of face as he glared round about him from betwixt his white wire-like whiskers. There were also present Mr. Emmett, an artist, who was making the voyage to the East for the purpose of painting Indian scenery, a man with long hair curling down his back, a ragged beard and moustaches, a velvet coat, and Byronic collars, out of which his long thin neck forked up like the head of a pole through a scarecrow's suit of clothes; Mr. Peter Hemskirk, who looked uncommonly fat, pale, and unfinished in his attire this morning; two young Civil Service fellows—as we should now call their trade—named Greenhew and Fairthorne; and Mr. Sylvanus Johnson, a journalist, bound to Bombay or Calcutta (I cannot be sure of the city) to edit a newspaper—a bullet-headed man, with a sort of low-comedian face,

very blue about the cheeks where he shaved, and small keen restless black eyes, full of intelligence, whose suggestion in that way was not to be impaired or weakened by an expression in repose of singular self-complacency. Captain Keeling, at the head of the table, sat skewered up in his uniform frock-coat in stiff satin stock and collars. Mr. Prance occupied the other end of the table. He, too, was attired in a uniform resembling the dress worn by the skipper. He had a pleasant brown sailorly face, with a floating pose of head upon his shoulders that made one think of a soap-bubble poised on top of a pipe-stem. There were no ladies. Once I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Colonel Bannister's Roman nose, and grey hair ornamented with a large black lace cap, fitfully hovering for a moment or two in the wide hatch past the chief officer's chair, down which the steps led that went to the sleeping-berths. But the apparition vanished with almost startling suddenness, as though the old lady had fallen or been violently pulled below. When, later on, I inquired after her, I learnt that she had betaken herself again to her bunk.

It was a mighty uncomfortable breakfast. The ship was rolling violently and convulsively upon the short snappish Channel seas—the most insufferable of all waters when in commotion, making even the seasoned salt pine for the long regular rhythmic heave of the blue ocean billow. The fiddles hindered the plates from sliding on to our laps; but their contents were not to be so easily coaxed into keeping their place; an unusually heavy lurch shot a large helping of liver and bacon on to Mr. Hemskirk's knees; and the ship's surgeon, Dr. Hemmeridge, came perilously near to being badly scalded by Mr. Johnson, the literary man, who, in reaching for a cup of tea, tilted the swinging tray. There was not much talk, and what little was said chiefly concerned the incident of the previous evening.

'Captain,' cried young Mr. Fairthorne in an effeminate voice—he was the gentleman, it seems, who last night had been calling upon anybody to smother the ayah—'whath to become of thothe poor Frenchmen?'

'Sir,' answered Captain Keeling in a manner as stiff as a marline-spike with his dislike of the subject, 'I do not know.'

'Frenchmen,' cried Colonel Bannister in a loud voice, as though he were directing the manœuvres of a company of sepoys, 'are the hereditary enemies of our country, and it never can matter to a Briton what becomes of them.'

'Boot my tear sir,' remarked Mr. Hemskirk, 'you are a Briton yes—and you are a Christian too, und der Frenchman iss your broder.'

'My what?' roared the Colonel. 'Tell ye what it is, Mr. Hemskirk: it is a good job that you cannot pronounce our language, otherwise you might happen sometimes, sir, to grow offensive.'

Mynheer, who seemed to have had some previous acquaintance

with this little bombshell of a man, dried the grease upon his lips with a napkin, and cast a wink upon Mr. Greenhew, whose face of resentment at this familiarity caused me to break into such an immoderate fit of laughter that there was nothing for it but to bolt from the table.

I found a real Channel picture stretching round me when I gained the deck ; a grey sky, lightened in places with a kind of suffusion of radiance that made one think of the rusty bronze lingering in the wake of an expired sunset. Saving these flaws of dull light, there was no break anywhere visible in the wide cold bald stare of heaven over our mastheads. The strong wind was a dry one, yet the horizon was thick with a look of rain all the way round ; and out of the smother in the south the sea was rolling in heights of a dark green, rich with creaming foam, that somehow seemed to satisfy the eye, as though each frothing crest were a streak of sunshine. There was a smack half a mile to windward of us staggering along, and sinking and rising under a fragment of red mainsail ; but there was nothing else to be seen in that way.

The wind was blowing free for us—almost dead abeam, indeed ; and the *Countess Ida* was swarming through it in a manner to put a quicker beat into the heart at the first sight of the picture she made. The topgallantsail was set over the single-reefed maintopsail ; the whole foresail was on her, and, with the other topsails and a staysail or two, was tearing the great ship through the short savage heapings of water with a power that made one think of steam as trifling by comparison. The forecastle was wet with flying spray. The galley chimney was smoking cheerily, and from all about the long-boat came hearty farmyard sounds of the grunting of pigs and the bleating of sheep and the cackling of hens. There was a gang of seamen at the pumps, and as they plied the brakes with nervous sinewy arms, their song chimed in with the gushing of the water flowing freely to the scuppers, and washing back again to their feet with every roll to windward. Other seamen were at work upon the carronades, or cleaning paint-work with scrubbing-brushes, or coiling gear away upon pins, and so on, and so on. It was after eight, and all hands were on deck, and a fine set of livelies they looked, spite of most of them being snugged up in black or yellow oil-skins. Ships went with full companies in those days, and but for the slenderness of our ordnance, it might have been easy to imagine one's self on board a man-of-war when one ran one's eyes over the decks of the *Countess Ida* and counted the crew, and marked the butcher and butcher's mates, the cook and *his* mates, the baker and *his* mates, the carpenter and *his* mates, coming and going, and making a very fair of the neighbourhood of the galley.

The second mate, warmly clad, paced the weather side of the poop, sending many a weatherly glance to seaward, with a frequent lifting of his eyes to the rounded iron-hard canvas ; whilst against the brilliant white wake of the ship, roaring and boiling upwards,

as it seemed, to the stoop of the Indiaman's huge square counter, the figures of the two sailors at the big wheel stood out clear-cut as cameos, with the broad brass band upon the circle dully reflecting a space of copperish light in the sky over the weather mizzen-topsail yardarm, and the newly-polished hood of the binnacle gleaming as though sun-touched. A couple of midshipmen in pea-coats and brass buttons, curly-headed young rogues, with a spirit of mischief bright in every glance they sent, patrolled the lee side of the poop; and up in the mizzen-top were two more of them, with yet another long-legged fellow jockeying a spur of the cross-trees, with his loose trousers rattling like a flag; but what job he was upon I could not tell. The planks of this deck were as white as the trunk of a tree newly stripped of its bark. Four handsome quarter-boats swung at the davits. Along the rail on either hand went a row of hencoops, through the bars of which the heads of cocks and hens came and went in a winking sort of way, like a swift showing and withdrawing of red rags. On the rail, for a considerable distance, were stowed bundles of compressed hay, the scent of which was a real puzzle to the nose, coming as it did through the hard sweep of the salt wind. The white skylights glistened through the intricacies of brass wire which shielded them. Abaft the wheel, on either side of it, their tompioned muzzles eyed blindly by the closed ports meant to receive them, were a couple of eighteen pounders; for in those days the Indiamen still went armed; not heavily, indeed, as in the war-times of an earlier period, but with artillery and small-arms enough to enable her to dispute with some promise of success with the picaroon who was still afloat, whose malignant flag the burnished waters of the Antilles yet reflected, and whose amiable company of assassins were as often to be met with under the African and South American heights as in the Channel of the Mozambique, or eastward yet on the broad surface of the Indian Ocean.

I crossed the deck to where Mr. Cocker was stumping, and asked him if he could tell me off what part of the English coast our ship now was.

'Drawing on to the Wight, sir,' he answered, with a sort of groping look in the little moist blue eyes he turned over the lee bow into the thickness beyond.

'Well, we're blowing through it, anyway,' said I. 'I shouldn't have allowed these heels for any conceivable structure born with such bows as the *Countess Ida*. What is it?' I asked with a glance at the broad dazzle of yeast dancing and whipping and slinging off the Indiaman's tall side against the hurl of the weather surge.

'It'll be all eight,' answered the second officer; 'it would be ten had she worked herself loose of the grip of the stevedores. She wants the mainsail and foreto'garn'sail. These old buckets are manufactured to creak, and whilst they creak, they hold, it is said.'

His face crumpled up into a grin that made him look twenty years older under the thatch of his sou'-wester curling to his eyebrows, with the broad flaps over his ears like a nightcap for his sea-helmet to sit upon.

'Pray, Mr. Cocker,' said I, 'was any damage done to the ship by the collision last night?'

'There wasn't so much as a rope-yarn parted,' he answered. 'I looked to see the spritsail yard sprung, for it'll have been that spar, I reckon, which dragged the lugger's masts overboard by the shrouds of them. But it's as sound as anything else aboard the ship.'

He shifted uneasily, as though to make off, and, turning my head, I spied the captain looking into the binnacle. So, having had already enough of the deck, I stepped below for a smoke in the cuddy recess, where I found Mr. Emmett in a long cloak, such as mysterious assassins and renegade noblemen used to wear at the Coburg Theatre, sucking at a large curled meerschaum pipe, and arguing on the subject of longitude with a little man almost a dwarf, an honest and highly intelligent pigmy, with the head of a giant supported on the legs of a boy of six, an amiable earnest little creature, with a trick of looking up wistfully into your face. His name was Richard Saunders: and I afterwards understood that he was proceeding to India on behalf of some Pharmaceutical Society, to collect information on and examples of Hindu and other medicines, drugs, charms, and so forth.

Well, all that day it continued to blow a very strong wind. The ship's plunging increased as the Channel opened under her bow and admitted something of the weight of the Atlantic in the run of its seas. There was a constant sharp-shooting of spray forward over the forecastle, and the wet came sobbing along the lee scuppers to where the cuddy front checked it under the poop ladder. Very few of us assembled at lunch or at dinner.

During the progress of this last meal, Colonel Bannister left the table and went below, and, after an interval, uprose through the hatch, with his large distinguished-looking wife holding on to him. Mynheer Peter Hemskirk, on seeing her, cried out: 'Ah, Meestrees Bannister, boot dot iss vot I call plooky!' and Mr. Johnson came near to breaking his neck whilst starting to his legs to stand as she passed. She took a chair next her husband, and sat grimly staring around her, her lips pale with the compression of them. She shook her head to every suggestion made by the steward, and then, being unable to hold out any longer, seized hold of her little ramrod of a husband and went staggering and rolling below with him. When he returned, he tossed down a glass of wine with an angry gesture and a fierce countenance, and looking at Hemskirk, cried out: 'I've a great respect for my wife, sir, and she's a fine woman in every sense of the word.—The Dutchman nodded.—'But,' continued the Colonel, clenching his fist, 'if ever I go to sea with a woman again, be she wife, aunt, or

grandmother, may I be poisoned for a lunatic, and my remains committed to the deep. This is the fourth time I've sworn it—my mind is now resolved!'

Out of all this sort of thing one could get a laugh here and there; but on the whole it was desperately weary work, and continued so till we had blown clear of soundings. Altogether, it was as ugly a down Channel run as any man would pray to be preserved from; the atmosphere grey, the seas a muddy green, the howling blast chill as a November morn, often darkening to a squall, that would sweep between the masts in horizontal lines of rain sparkling like steel, and with spite enough in the lancing of them to compel the strongest to turn his back. Now and again a lady passenger would show in the cuddy; but though there were some twenty-eight of us in all, not reckoning a couple of ayahs, and a Chinaman in the garb of his country, who acted as nurse to one Mrs. Trevor's baby, never once in those days did above seven of us, barring the skipper and his mates, sit down to a meal.

The thick weather lay heavily upon the captain's mind, held him in fits of abstraction whilst at table, dismissed him after a brief sitting to the deck, and kept him heedful and taciturn whilst there. He had had one collision, and wanted no more; and you would notice how that tragedy had served him, by observing him when in the cuddy to prick up his ears to the least unusual noise on deck, to glance at the tell-tale compass over his head, as though it were the sun which he had been patiently waiting for a chance to 'shoot,' to swallow his food with impatient motions to the steward to bear a hand, and to bolt up the cabin steps without a smile or syllable of apology to us for quitting the table.

CHAPTER IV

LOUISE TEMPLE

But there came a change at last. Ushant was then many long leagues astern, and the night had been dark but quiet, with a long Biscayan swell brimming to our starboard quarter, and a play of sheet-lightning off the lee bow, and wind enough to send the India-man through it at some six knots with her royals and cross-jack furled and the weather clew of her mainsail up. This was as the picture showed when I went to bed at five bells—half-past ten—and on opening my eyes next morning I found the berth brilliant with sunshine, bulkhead and ceiling trembling to the glory rippling off the sea through the large round scuttle or port-hole, and the action of the ship a stately gliding, with a slow long floating heave that raised no sound whatever of creak or straining, and that, after the long spell of tumblefication, was as grateful to every sense and to all wearied bones as the firm unrocking surface of dry land.

Mr. Colledge was shaving himself. I lay eyeing him for a few minutes, admiring the handsome high-born looks of the youth, and thinking it was a pity that such manly beauty as his should lack the consecrating touch of an intellectual expression to parallel his physical graces. He saw me in the glass in which he was scraping himself.

'Good-morning, Dugdale. I feel all right again, d'ye know. I am going to eat my breakfast in the cuddy and then go on deck.'

'Glad to hear it,' said I, putting my legs over the side of the bunk.

'I suppose there'll be some girls about this morning,' said he. 'Who the dooce are the passengers, I wonder? Anybody very nice aboard, not counting that ripping young lady with the black eyes?'

'Nearly everybody's been as sea-sick as you,' said I; 'and the few who have put in an appearance are males—your friend Emmett, the fat Dutchman, and two or three others.

'Oh, you mean Mynheer Hemskirk, the corpulent chap, whose voice sounds like that of a man inside a rum puncheon talking through the bunghole.'

I asked him if he could tell me anything about Miss Temple, the black-eyed lady.

'Someone told me at Gravesend,' he answered—'but I don't know who it was—that she's a daughter of Sir Conyers Temple. I think I've heard my father speak of him as a man he has hunted with. If he's that Sir Conyers, he broke his neck four years ago in a steeplechase.'

'Who accompanies the young lady to India, I wonder?' said I.

'Her aunt, I believe; but I don't know her name. But I say, though, what makes you so inquisitive?'

'Oh, my dear Colledge,' said I, 'one is always inquisitive about one's fellow-passengers on board ship. The girl came up to me on deck the other night when the row of the collision was in full swing. I see her big eyes now—black as ebony, yet luminous too, with the flame of a flare-tin at the side reflected in each magnificent orb in a spot of crimson which made her pale hooded face as mystical as a vision of the night.'

He turned to stare at me, and broke into a laugh. 'So! *you* are the poet amongst the passengers, eh? as Emmett's the painter? What's to be *my* walk? Oh, there goes the first breakfast-bell! Heaven bless us, what a delightful thing it is not to feel sea-sick!'

We continued to gabble a bit in this fashion; he then left the berth, and a little later I followed him.

The large cuddy wore an aspect it had not before exhibited. The sunshine sparkled upon the skylights, and the interior was full of the blue and silver radiance of the rich and welcome autumn morning outside. The long table was all aglow with the silver and crystal furniture of the white damask, and through the glazed

domes in the upper deck you could see the canvas on the mizzen swelling in a milky softness from yard to yard as the sails mounted to the height of the tender little royal.

The passengers came from the deck or up from below one after another; the change in the weather had acted as a charm, and here now was the whole mob of us, one old lady excepted, with a glimpse to be had of the two ayahs sunning themselves on the quarter-deck. The skipper, looking a bit stale, as with too much of all-night work, but smart enough in the gingerbread trickery of his uniform, made a little speech of compliments to the ladies and gentlemen from the head of the table. There was a courtliness about the old fellow that gained not a little in relish from a sort of deep-sea flavour in his manner and varying expressions of face. I liked the quality of the bow with which he accompanied his answer to any lady who addressed him.

I sat at the bottom of the table, on the right hand of the chief officer, and was able to command a pretty good view of the people that I was to be associated with, as I might suppose, for the next three or four, and perhaps five months. There were several girls amongst us—two Miss Joliffes, three Miss Brookes's, Miss Hudson, and four or five more. Miss Hudson was exceedingly pretty—hair of dark gold, and a skin delicate as a lily, upon which lay a kind of golden tinge—oh, call it not freckles! though I dare say the charming effect was produced by something of that sort. Her eyes were large, moist, violet in hue, with slightly-lifted eyebrows, which gave them an arch look. Mr. Sylvanus Johnson, who sat next me, after staring at her a little, muttered in my ear in a dramatic undertone: 'Perdita has expressed that girl, sir:

> Violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
> Or Cytherea's breath.'

'If that be her mother next to her,' said I, 'fix your attention upon her, Mr. Johnson, and Perdita's fancy will exhale!'

And indeed Mrs. Hudson was a very extraordinary, and I may say violent contrast to her daughter: a pursy lady of about fifty, with a heavy under-lip, puffed-out cheeks of a bluish tint, and a wig, the youthful hue of which defined every trace of age in her countenance, till one thought of her as being some score years older than she really was.

But the interior was wonderfully humanised by these ladies. Their dress, the sparkle of jewels in their ears, on their fingers and throats, here and there a turban seated high on some motherly head—it was the age of turbans and feathers—the soft notes of the girls running an undertone of music through the deeper voices of the matrons and the growling of us males grumbling conversation across and up the table, whipped the fancy ashore and made one think of drawing-rooms and guitars and Books of Beauty.

There was one lady, however, who held my eye from the start. She was Miss Louise Temple, and I cannot express how deep was

the admiration her charms excited in me. I told you that I had caught a glimpse of her at Gravesend; but, down to this moment, I had been unable to obtain a fair view of her. Her hair that, to judge by the coils of it, when let down would have reached to below her knees, was of a wonderful blackness without either gloss or deadness. She wore it in a manner that was perfectly new in those days: in twinings which heaped it up to the aspect of a crown; whilst behind it was brushed up in a way to exhibit the lovely form of the head from the curve of the neck to where the beautiful tresses lay piled. Her face was perfectly colourless, the complexion clear, and the skin exquisitely delicate. Her mouth was small, the upper lip slightly curved, and there was the hint of a pout in the faint, scarce perceptible protrusion of the under-lip. Her nose was perfectly straight, like a Greek woman's; but it had the English indent under the brow, and therefore had the beauty which, to my fancy, no Greek profile ever yet possessed.

But her eyes! How am I to describe them? What impression can I hope to convey by such terms as large, black, soft, and fluid? The lids were delicately veined, the eyelashes long, and between these fringes the eyes shone of a dark liquid loveliness, full of the light, as it seemed to me, of a high intelligence, with spirit and haughtiness in every glance. They were the most dramatic, by which I do not mean theatric, pair of twinklers that ever sparkled star-like under the beauty of a woman's brow; created, you might have thought, for the interpretation of the Shakespearean imaginations, with all capacity in them of surprise, scorn, resentment, melting tenderness, and of every fine and noble passion. She was attired in a dress of black cloth, simple as a riding-habit of to-day, and so fitting her figure as to express without exaggeration every point of grace in the curves and fulness of her tall but still maidenly form.

I caught her glance for a moment; I am sure she remembered me as the passenger she had addressed on the poop; yet there was not the faintest expression of recognition in the full, firm, swift stare she honoured me with. She looked away from me as haughtily as a queen, with flashing inspection of the others of the row of us that confronted her, though it seemed to me that her gaze lingered a little on the Honourable Mr. Colledge, who was seated immediately opposite.

'I reckon now,' whispered Mr. Prance, leaning to me in his chair from his athwartship post at the foot of the table, 'that yonder Miss Temple will be about the handsomest woman that was ever afloat.'

'There have been many thousands of women afloat,' said I, 'since Noah got under way with the ladies of his family aboard.'

'I have been sailing in passenger-ships,' said he, 'for nineteen years come next month, and have never before seen such a figure-head as Miss Temple's. What teeth she has! Little teeth, sir, as all women's should be; and where's the whiteness that's to be compared to them?'

'Who is that homely, pleasant-faced woman sitting by her side?'

'Her aunt, Mrs. Radcliffe,' he answered.

'What errand carries that stately creature to India, do you know, Mr. Prance?'

'I do not, sir.'

'Not very likely,' I continued, 'that she's bound out in search of a husband.'

'No, no,' he muttered. 'The like of her have a big enough market at home to command. No need for *her* to cross the ocean to find a sweetheart. She's the daughter of a dead baronet, a tenth title, so the captain was saying; and her mother has a large estate to live on. Captain Keeling knows all about them. Her ladyship was seized with paralysis when her husband was brought home with his neck broken, and has been a sheer hulk ever since, I believe, poor thing. We brought Mrs. Radcliffe to England last voyage. Her husband's a big planter up country, and worth a lac or two. I expect Miss Temple is going out on a visit—nothing more. Her health may need a voyage. Those choice bits of mechanism often go wrong in their works. She wants a stroke of colour in her cheeks. 'Tis the scent of the milkmaid that she lacks, sir.'

He gave a pleasant nod, quietly rose, and went on deck by way of the cuddy front, to relieve the second officer, who was watching the ship for him whilst he breakfasted.

At such a first meal as this, so to speak, when, barring one, we had all come together for the first time, there was no want of British reserve and shyness. We chiefly contented ourselves with staring. Colonel Bannister alone talked freely; he was loud on the subject of army grievances, and was rendered, indeed, intolerably fluent and noisy by the respectful attention he received from a gentleman who sat over against him, one Mr. Hodder, a tall, thin, nervous, yellow-faced man, with a paralytic catching up of his breath in his speech, who was going to India to fill some post of responsibility in a college. Mrs. Bannister with her hawksbill nose, grey hair, and full figure, sat bolt upright, eating with avidity, and sweeping the faces round about her with a small severe eye.

I watched little Mrs. Radcliffe with attention. It was not hard to guess that she was an amiable, fidgety, anxious body, of elastic properties of mind, easily, but only temporarily, to be repressed. She talked in a quick way to her niece, darting what she had to say into the girl's ear, with an abrupt withdrawal of her head, and an earnest look at Miss Temple's face. The other would sometimes faintly smile, but for the most part her air was one of haughty abstraction. Indeed, it was easy to see that, so far as her opinion of her fellow-passengers went, it was not quite flattering to the bulk of us.

It was a noble morning, indeed, on deck. There was a long

blue heave of swell from the northward, quiet as the rise and fall of a sleeper's breast, and the white buttons of the ship's trucks, glancing like silver against the moist blue of the sky, swung so slowly and tenderly to and fro that one could almost watch them without perception of any movement. The ocean was of a deep-sea blue, all to eastward flashing under the sun, and the small waves chased us with a voice of summer in the caressing seething of the snow of their heads against the sides of the Indiaman. The ship had studdingsails set, and under these far overhanging wings the water trembled back the radiance that fell from the swelling cloths, as though there were a floating thinness of quicksilver there prismatic as a soap-bubble.

Very soon after breakfast the poop was filled, and I marked the Jacks forward staring aft at the sight of us all. It was not hot enough for an awning, and there was still too much edge in the breeze, warmly as the sun looked down, to suffer the ladies to sit for any length of time. The picture was a cheerful one, full of movement and life and colour. The white-headed skipper, skewered up in his bebuttoned and belaced frock-coat, patrolled the weather side of the deck with Mrs. Radcliffe on his arm. Mr. Emmett paced the planks with Mrs. Joliffe and her daughters, and I could hear him bidding them admire the contrast between the violet shadowing in the hollows of the sails and the delicate sheen of the edges against the blue, as though at those extremities they dissolved into pure lustre. Little Mr. Saunders trotted alongside the orbicular form of Mynheer Hemskirk, who showed as a giant as he looked down into the earnest upstaring face of the bigheaded little chap. Three Civil Service youths lounged upon a hencoop, looking askant at the young ladies, and laughing under their breaths at what one or another of them said. Near the foremost skylight stood Mr. Johnson and Colonel Bannister. One did not need to listen attentively to understand that the Colonel was falling foul of the calling of journalism, and that Mr. Johnson was endeavouring to defend it by repeating over and over again: 'Granted—I admit it—I'm not going to say no; but give me leave to ask, where on earth would your profession be, sir, if its actions were not chronicled?' These remarks he continued to reiterate till the Colonel was in a white heat, and I had to walk away to conceal my laughter.

As I passed the companion hatchway, which you will please to understand is the hooded entrance to the cuddy by way of the poop, Miss Temple came up out of it, closely followed by Mr. Colledge. There was something like a smile on her pale face, and he was talking with animation. She wore a black hat, wide at the brim, with a large black feather encircling it, and a sort of jacket with some rich trimming of dark fur upon it. I was close enough to overhear them as they emerged.

'I quite remember my dear father speaking of Lord Sandown,' she said, coming to a stand at the head of the companion steps,

and sending a sparkling sweeping look along the decks. 'Is not Lady Isabella FitzJames an aunt of yours, Mr. Colledge?'

'Oh yes. I hope you don't know her,' he answered. 'She writes books, you know, and fancies herself a wit; and her conversation is as parching as the seed-cake she used to give me when I was a boy.'

'I have met her,' said Miss Temple. 'I rather liked her. Perhaps she neglects to be clever in the company of her own sex.'

'Ever been to India before?' he asked.

'No,' she answered in a voice whose note of affability somehow by no means softened her haughty regard of the passengers as they walked past. 'I am entirely obliging my aunt by undertaking the trip. My uncle is very old, and too infirm to make the passage to England, and he was extremely anxious for my mother and me to spend some months with him. Of course it was a ridiculous invitation as far as poor mamma is concerned. You know she is a helpless cripple, Mr. Colledge.'

'Oh, indeed. I didn't know. I am very sorry, I'm sure,' said he.

'I shall not remain long,' she continued; 'most probably I shall return in this ship.'

'By George, though, I hope you will!' he exclaimed. 'I'm booked to come home in her too. There'll be more shooting in three months than I shall want, you know. I mean to pot a few tigers, and try my hand on a wild elephant or two. By Jove, Miss Temple, if you'll allow me, you shall have the skin of the first tiger I shoot!'

'Oh, you are too good, Mr. Colledge,' said she, with a smile trembling on her parted lips, lifting her hand as she spoke to smooth a streak of hair off her forehead with fingers that sparkled with rings; but her eyes were brighter than any of her gems; they turned at that instant full upon me as I stood looking at her a little way past the mizzen-mast, and there seemed something of positive insolence in the brief stare she fixed upon me; the faint smile vanished to the curl of her upper lip as she turned her head.

That, my fine madam, thought I, may be your manner of regarding everything which is not to be found in the Peerage.

Colledge, who had followed her glance, saw me.

'Oh, Dugdale,' he cried, 'can you tell me anything about tigers' skins—how long it takes to doctor them into rugs and all that sort of thing, don't you know?'

'I can tell you nothing about tigers' skins,' said I curtly. 'I have never seen a tiger.'

'Know anything about lions' skins, then?' he sung out with a half-smile, meant, as my temper fancied, for Miss Temple.

'The ass in the fable clothed himself in one, I believe,' said I, 'but his roar betrayed him.'

'Now I come to think of it,' said he, 'I believe there are no lions in India;' and he looked from me to the girl with a face of

interrogation so full of good temper as to satisfy me that at heart he was a kindly-natured young fellow.

'I think I shall walk, Mr. Colledge,' said Miss Temple.

They joined the folks promenading the weather-deck, and I went to the recess under the poop to smoke a pipe.

I leaned in a sulky mood against the bulkhead. There was a sense upon me as of having been snubbed. I was a young man in those days, of an uncomfortably sensitive disposition. Yet there should have been virtue enough in that glorious morning to soothe in one's soul a keener sting than was to be inflicted by a handsome woman's scornful glance. The slight leaning away of the ship from the soft breeze showed a space over the bulwark rails of the sparkling azure under the sun steeping to the delicate silver-blue of the sky, with a small star-like point of white in the far-off airy dazzle, marking the topmost cloths of a ship out there. The white planks under my feet had the glistening look of sand, now that the decks had been washed down, and had dried out into a frosting of themselves, as it were, with tiny crystals of brine. The shadows of the rigging in ink-black lines swung sleepily to the motion of the fabric. The Chinaman nurse, in a gown of blue, and wide blue trousers, and pimrose-coloured face, and a gleaming tail like a dead black serpent lying down his back, leaned against a carronade, tossing the little baby he had charge of till the plump little sweet crowed again with delight. On the warm tarpaulin over the main-hatch sat the two ayahs, crooning over the infants they held, often lifting their eyes, like beads of unpolished indigo stuck into slips of mottled soap, to the poop, where the mothers of their youngsters were. There was a taste as of a hubble-bubble in the air, with the faint relish of bamboo chafing-gear and cocoa-nut ropes. The hubble-bubble, I dare say, was a fancy wrought by the spectacle of those black faces, and helped by a noise of parrots somewhere aft.

A length of sail was stretched along the waist, and upon it were seated several sailors, flourishing palms and needles as they stitched. They talked together in a low voice that the mate of the watch should not hear them. At one of the fellows who sat with his face towards me, I found myself looking as at a curiosity that slowly compels the attention, spite of any heedless mood you may be in. Many ugly mariners had I met in my time, but never the like of that man. His right eye had a lamentable cast; his back was so round that I imagined he had a hunch. He had enormously long strong arms, with immense fists at the ends of them, and the sleeves of his shirt being rolled to above his elbow exposed a score of extraordinary devices in Indian ink writhing amongst the hair that lay in places like fur upon the flesh. The bridge of his nose had been crushed to his face, and a mere knob with two holes in it stood out about an inch above his hare-lip. Though manifestly an old sailor, salted down for ship's use by years of seafaring, his complexion was dingy and dough-like as the skin of a London baker, with nothing distinctive upon it saving a number of warts,

and a huge mole over a ridge of scarlet eyebrow dashed with a few grey hairs. His hair, that was of coarse brick-red, hung down upon his back, as though, forsooth, the ship's cook had made a wig for him out of the parings of carrots. Indeed, he was as much a monster as anything that was ever shut up in a cage and carried about as a show.

I was watching him with growing interest, wondering to myself what sort of a life such a creature as that had led, what kind of ships he had sailed in chiefly, and how so grotesque an object had been suffered to 'sign on' for an Indiaman, in which one might expect to find something of a man-of-war uniformity and smartness of crew, when Mr. Sylvanus Johnson came out from the cuddy, rolling an unlighted cheroot betwixt his lips.

'See that chap sitting upon the sail yonder?' said I—'a good subject for a leading article, Mr. Johnson.'

'Oh, confound it, Mr. Dugdale; no sneers, if you please. Let me light this cigar at your pipe. That fellow is in Emmett's way, not mine. Quite a triumph of hideousness, I protest. But what's the matter with you, this lovely morning? You look a bit down in the mouth, Mr. Dugdale. Not going to be sea-sick, I hope, now that all the rest of us have recovered?'

'Down in the mouth? Not I. But I'll tell you what, Mr. Johnson—when you take charge of your newspaper, will you be so good as to inform the world that there is nothing under the broad sky more consumedly insipid than the chattering of a young man and a young woman when they first meet.'

'Why, how now?' said he.

'Oh, my dear sir,' cried I, 'hear them. The unspeakable drivel of it—the "reallys" and "oh dears" and "yes quites"——'

'Yes,' said Mr. Johnson, looking at the ash of his cigar after every puff; 'I think I know what you mean. But it is the effect of politeness, I believe. A young gentleman and a young lady who desire to please will begin very low with each other, lest they should prove disconcerting. But what d'ye say'—he lowered his voice—'to the drivel, as you call it, of a man of advanced years?'—here he looked into the cuddy, then took a step forward to peer up at the poop—'of a person who has seen the world—of a colonel, in short? I wish to be on good terms with my fellow-passengers; but if that man Bannister goes on as he has begun, I'm afraid—I'm afraid it will end in my having to pull his nose.'

He sent another nervous look into the cuddy and frowned upon his cigar end.

'Has he been offensive?' said I.

'Well, judge,' he exclaimed, 'when I tell you that he said there wasn't a respectable man connected with journalism; that the calling was distinctly a tipsy one; that his idea of a journalist was that of a man lying in bed till his only shirt came from the wash, and inventing lies to publish to the world when the washerwoman enabled him to clothe himself.—"And pray, sir," said I, sneering at

him, "what would the country know of your military achievements if it were not for the journalist? You army gentlemen profess to despise him; but you will get up very early to buy his paper if you have a notion that there will be any mention of your doings in it." —That was pretty warm, I think?'

'Rather,' said I; 'and what did he say?'

'He answered that if any other man but myself had said as much, he would have told him to go and be damned.'

'Well,' said I, 'I hope the passengers may prove a companionable body, I am sure. For my part, it is more likely than not that my place of abode whilst the weather permits will be the foretop. Anything to escape overhearing the insipidity of a chat between a young man and a young woman when they first meet.'

'I see,' said he, 'that your friend Colledge has hooked himself on to Miss Temple. I should say he needs to be the son of a nobleman to make headway with such a Cleopatra as her ladyship. Fine eyes, perhaps; but a little pale, eh? Give me Miss Hudson. I don't admire the sneering part of the sex.'

'Nor I,' said I.

'But every woman,' said he, 'has a way of her own of making love. Some simper themselves into a man's affection, and some triumph by scorn and contempt. Do you remember how the Duchess of Cleveland made love to Wycherley? She put her head out of the coach window and cried out to him: "Sir, you're a rascal, you're a villain!" and Pope tells us that Wycherley from that moment entertained hopes.'

But by this time my pipe was smoked out; and catching sight of Mynheer Hemskirk and a passenger named Adams, a lawyer, coming down the ladder with the notion as I might guess of joining us in the recess that was the one smoking-room of the ship, I bolted forwards, got upon the forecastle, and overhung the rail, where I lay for a long half-hour lazily enjoying the sight of the massive cutwater of the Indiaman rending the brilliant blue surface, with a clear lift of azure water either hand of her, that broke into a little running stream of foam abreast of the catheads, and swarmed quietly aft in foam-bells and winking bubbles, that made one think of the froth at the foot of a cascade gliding along the crystal-clear breast of a stream to the murmur of summer leaves and the horn-like hum of insects.

CHAPTER V

A MYSTERIOUS VOICE

WELL, all that day the weather held fine and clear; indeed, we might have been on the Madeira parallels; and I said to Mr. Prance that it was enough to make one keep a bright look-out for the flying-fish. The sky was of a wonderful softness of blue, piebald in the

main, with small snow-like puffs of cloud flying low, as though they were a fog that had broken up. A large black ship passed us in the afternoon. She was close hauled, and being to leeward, showed to perfection when she came abreast. Her sails seemed to be formed of cotton cloth, and mounted in three spires to little skysails, with a crowd of fleecy jibs curving at the bowsprit and jib-booms, and many staysails between the masts softly shadowed like a drawing in pencil. The lustre lifting off the sea was reverberated in a row of scuttles, and the flash of the glass was so like the yellow blaze of a gun that you started to the sight, and strained your ear an instant for the report.

She was too far off to hail. The captain, standing in the midst of a crowd of ladies, said that she was an American, and told the second officer, who had the watch, to make the *Countess Ida's* number.

'Oh, what a lovely string of flags!' exclaimed Miss Hudson, who stood near me, following with her languishing violet eyes the soaring of the mani-coloured bunting as it rose to the block of the peak signal halliards like the tail of a kite. 'Is there anybody very important in that ship that we are honouring him with that pretty display?'

'No,' said I, laughing, as I let my gaze sink fair into the sweet depths of her wonderful peepers. 'By means of those flags the *Countess Ida* is telling yonder craft who she is, so that when she arrives home she may report us.'

'Oh, how heavenly! Only think of a ship being made to tell her name! Oh, mamma,' she cried, making a step to catch hold of her mother's gown, and to give it a tweak, as the old lady stood at the rail gazing at the American vessel from the ambush of a large bonnet, shaped like a coal-scuttle: 'imagine, dear: Mr. Dugdale says that the *Countess Ida* is telling that ship who she is. How clever men are—particularly sailors. I love sailors.'

Her melting eyes sought the deck, and the long lashes drooped in a tender shadow of beauty upon the faint golden tinge of her cheeks.

'La, now, to think of it!' cried Mrs. Hudson. 'Well, those who go down into the sea, as the saying is, do certainly see some wonderful things.'

Here Mr. Colledge, who did not know, I suppose, that I was conversing with these ladies, came up to me and said: 'By the way, Dugdale, what was that joke of yours about the lion's skin this morning? Miss Temple says it was meant for a joke; but hang me if I can see any point in it.'

'What did I say?' I asked.

He repeated the remark.

'Oh, yes; the young lady is right,' said I, sending a look at her as she stood near the wheel by her aunt's side—the pair of them well away from the rest of us—gazing through a pair of delicate little opera-glasses at the Yankee; 'it was a joke. What a capital

memory you have! But as to point, it had none, and the joke, my dear fellow, lies in that.'

'Well,' said he, 'it makes a man feel like an ass to miss a good thing when a lady is standing by who can see it clearly enough to laugh at it afterwards.'

'Yes,' I exclaimed; 'very true indeed. What a fine picture that ship makes, eh? There goes her answering pennant! Let them say what they will of Jonathan, he has a trick high above the art of John Bull in shipbuilding.'

I watched his handsome face as he peered at her. He turned to me and said: 'D'ye know, there's a doocid lot of humour in the idea of the point of a joke lying in its having no point;' and with that he went over to Miss Temple, whose haughty face softened into a smile to his approach; and there for some time the three of them stood, he ogling the American (that was slowly slipping into toy-like dimensions upon our quarter) through the girl's binocular; whilst she talked with him, as I could tell by the movement of her lips, Mrs. Radcliffe meanwhile looking on with fidgety motions of her head, and frequent glances at her niece, the nervous interrogative slightly troubled character of which was as suggestive to me as to how it stood between them, as if she had come to my side and whipped out that she was really afraid that Louise's character would make the charge of her a worry and a perplexity.

There was a noble sunset that evening. In the west lay stretched a delicate curtain of cloud linked in shapes of shell, with dashes here and there as of mares' tails; whilst near the sea-line the vapour was more compacted, still linked, but with a closer inwreathing, as like to chain armour as anything I can compare it to. When the sun sank into this exquisite lace of vapour, it lighted up a hundred colours all over it, which transformed the whole of the western heavens into a most gorgeous and dazzling tapestry. Never saw I before the like of such a sunset. But for the visible circle of the glowing mass of the orb, you would have thought those glorious shooting hues, those astonishing and sumptuous emissions of green and gold and purple, of rose and brilliant yellow and shining blue fainting into an unimaginably delicate texture of green, some phenomenal exhibition of electric splendour. The sea glowed under this vast display of western magnificence in fifty superb hues. We all stood looking, whilst the wondrous pageant slowly faded, the ship meanwhile reflecting the splendour in her sail still they showed like yellow satin against the soft evening blue gathering over the mastheads, as she pushed softly through the water, the oil-smooth surface of her wake lined with the spume broken out by the passage of her bows lifting tenderly on the swell that was flowing in long lines to the ship from out of the north-west.

The moon rose late, but it was a fine clear starlit dusk when eight bells of the second dog-watch floated along the decks and echoed quietly down out of the wind-hushed spaces of the canvas. The sea swept black to its confines where the low wheeling stars were

hovering like ships' lights in the immeasurable distance. The radiance of the cuddy lamps flung a sheen upon the quarter-deck atmosphere ; but away forward from abreast of the mainmast the ship lay black in the shadow of her own canvas, with a view of a few dark blotches of the forms of men moving about the forecastle, their figures showing out against the brilliant dust in the sky under the wide yawn of the fore-course.

Old Keeling was pacing the deck with studdingsails out on both sides, as Jack says, that is to say, with a lady on either arm. Other figures moved here and there ; and Mr. Cocker, who had charge of the deck, walked to and fro from rail to rail with the young fourth officer by his side, regularly pausing, ere swinging round for the stump back, to take a peep under the foot of the mainsail or to send a long look into the weather horizon. Little Mr. Saunders came up to me, spoke of the beauty of the evening, and asked me to walk. He was a very intelligent little chap, and had written several works on the superstitions of various peoples in relation to their treatment of diseases. He was wonderfully in earnest in all he said, and would again and again in his enthusiasm come to a stand, raise his arm to catch hold of a button of my coat, as if to detain me, meanwhile standing on the tips of his toes and peering up into my face. On the other side of the deck walked my friend Colledge between Miss Temple and her aunt. Three of the Civil Service gentlemen were in tow of Mrs. Brookes and her daughters ; and right aft, leaning in picturesque attitude against one of the guns, was Mr. Sylvanus Johnson airily and in a gallant tone of voice explaining to Mrs. and Miss Hudson how it was that the sun and moon were sometimes to be seen shining together. Down in the cuddy, directly under the after-skylight, sat Colonel Bannister playing whist with his wife, Mr. Hodder, and Mr. Adams ; and almost every time I passed I could hear the military man's voice remonstrating with one or the other of them for having played such or such a card : 'You should have led the knave, sir. What on earth, my dear, made you trump spades? No, no ; I was right ! I believe I am not to be taught whist at my time of life, sir ; ' and so on, and so on.

By-and-by a bell rang to summon the passengers below to such refreshments of wine and biscuits and strong waters as they chose to partake of. The promenaders in shadowy forms melted down the companion hatchway, and two or three of us only remained on deck. Mr. Colledge was one of them. He came over to me, staring in my face, to make sure of me, and exclaimed : 'I wish they would allow a man to smoke up here. What is the evil in a pipe of tobacco or a cheroot, that you must go and sneak into a dark corner to light it?'

'How is it that you are not below with Miss Temple?' said I.

'Oh,' said he, laughing, 'I want to make her last me out the voyage, and that won't be done, you know, if we see too much of each other.'

'You are to be congratulated,' said I, 'on the compliment she pays you:

> Favours to none, to none she smiles extends;
> Oft she rejects, and oftener still offends.

That's not exactly how the poet puts it, but it is apter than the original.'

'Oh well, you know, Dugdale, she has met some of my people. I don't dislike her for holding off. It shows that her blood and instincts are English; though, faith, when I first saw her I took her to be a Spaniard. Between you and me, though, the golden-headed girl's the belle of the ship. What's her name?—Ah! Miss Hudson. Look at her as she sits in the light down there! Why, now, if I had your poetical turn, how would I spout whole yards about her fingers like snowflakes, and her lips like—— But see here! there's nothing new in the shape of imagery to apply to a pretty woman. Oh yes! Miss Hudson's the ship's beauty. But Miss Temple is ripping company, and, my stars! what eyes!'

'Take care,' said I, laughing, 'that you don't do what the man who marries the deceased wife's sister always does—wed the wrong one. Choose correctly at the start.'

He burst into a laugh.

'I am already engaged to be married,' said he. 'What single man of judgment would dare adventure a voyage to Bombay without securing himself in that fashion against all risks?'

I stared into his grinning face, as we stood at the skylight, to discover if he was in earnest.

'Keep your secret, Colledge,' said I; 'I'll not peach.'

Here the second mate interrupted us by singing out an order to the watch to haul down the fore and main topgallant studdingsails. Then he took in his lower and main topmast studdingsails. The men's noisy bawling made talking difficult, and Colledge went below for a glass of brandy-and-water. Presently old Keeling came on deck, and after a look around, and a pretty long stare over the weather bow, where there was a very faint show of lightning, he said something to the second mate and returned to the cuddy.

'In foretopmast studdingsail!' bawled Mr. Cocker; 'clew up the mizen-royal and furl it.'

A little group of midshipmen hovering in the dusk in the lee of the break of the poop, where the shadow of the great mainsail lay like the darkness of a thunderstorm upon the air, rushed to the mizzen rigging, and in a few moments the gossamer-like cloud floating under the mizzen-royal truck was melting out like a streak of vapour against the stars, with a couple of the young lads making the shrouds dance as they clawed their way up the ratlines.

'What's wrong with the weather, Mr. Cocker,' said I, 'that you are denuding the ship in this fashion?'

'Oh,' said he with a short laugh, 'Captain Keeling is a very cautious commander, sir. He'll never show a stun'sail to the night outside the tropics; and it is a regular business with us to furl the

fore and mizzen royal in the second dog-watch, though it is so fine to-night, he has let them fly longer than usual.'

'Humph!' said I; 'no wonder he's popular with lady passengers. I suppose there is no chance of the ship falling overboard with the main-royal still on her?'

'When it comes to my getting command,' said he, 'the world will find that I am for carrying on. What my ship can't carry she'll have to drag. I've made my calculations, and there's nothing with decent heels that shouldn't be able to make the voyage to India in seventy-five days. It is the trick of wind-jamming that stops us all. A skipper'll sweat his yards fore and aft sooner than be off his course by the fraction of a point. For my part, I'd make every foul wind a fair one.'

He called out some order to the group of shadows at work upon the lower studdingsail, and I went to the skylight with half a mind in me to go below and see what was doing there; but changed my intention when I saw friend Colledge leaning over a draughtboard with Miss Temple, Miss Hudson looking on at the game from the opposite side, and Mr. Johnson drawing diagrams with his forefinger to Mrs. Hudson in explanation of something I suppose that he was talking about.

I went right aft and sat myself upon a little bit of grating abaft the wheel, and there, spite of the adjacency of the man at the helm, I felt as much alone as if I had masthcaded myself. The great body of the Indiaman went away from me in a dark heap; the white deck of the poop was a mere faintness betwixt the rails. Her canvas rose in phantasmal ashen outlines, with a slow swing of stars betwixt the squares of the rigging, and a frequent flashing of meteors on high sailing amongst the luminaries in streaks of glittering dust. There was little more to be heard than the chafe of the tiller gear in its leading blocks, the occasional dim noise of a rope straining to the quiet lift of the Indiaman, the bubbling of water going away in holes and eddies from the huge rudder, and a dull tinkling of the piano in the saloon, and some lady singing to it.

All at once I spied the figure of a man dancing down the main shrouds in red-hot haste. I was going in a lounging way forward at the moment, and heard Mr. Cocker say: 'What the deuce is it?' The fellow standing on a ratline a little above the bulwark rail made some answer.

'You are mad,' cried the mate. 'What *are* you—an Irishman?'

'No, sir.' I had now drawn close enough to catch what was said. 'If I was, maybe I'd be a Papish, and then the sign of the cross would exercise [exorcise, I presume] the blooming voice overboard.'

'Voice in your eye!' cried Mr. Cocker. 'Up again with you! This is some new dodge for skulking. But you'll have to invent something better than a ghost before you knock off on any job you're upon aboard this ship.'

'What is it, sir?' called the voice of the captain from the companion, and he came marching up to us in his buttoned-up way, as though he sought to neutralise the trick of a deep sea roll by a soldierly posture.

'Why, sir,' answered Mr. Cocker, 'this man here has come down from aloft with a run to tell me that there's a ghost talking to him upon the topsail yard.'

'A what?' cried the captain.

'I 'splained it to the second officer as a woice, sir,' said the man, speaking very respectfully, but emphatically, as one talking out of a conviction.

'What did this voice say?' said the captain.

'I was mounting the topmast rigging,' replied the man, 'and my head was on a level with the tawps'l yard, when a woice broke into a sort of raw "haw-haw," and says, "What d'ye want?" it says. "Hook it!" it says. "I know you." So down I come.'

'Anybody skylarking up there, Mr. Cocker?'

The mate looked up with his hand to the side of his mouth. 'Aloft, there!' he bawled; 'anybody on the topsail yard?'

We all strained our ears, staring intently, but no response came, and there was nothing to be seen. Dark as the shadow of the night was up in the loom of the squares of canvas, it was not so black but that a human figure might have been seen up in it after some searching with the gaze.

'It's your imagination, my man,' said the captain, half turning as though to walk aft.

'Up aloft with you again, now!' exclaimed the second mate.

'By thunder, then,' cried the man, smiting the ratline with his fist, whilst he clipped hold of it with the other, swinging out and staring up, 'I'd rather go into irons for the rest of the woyage!'

By this time a number of the watch on deck had gathered about the main hatchway, and stood in a huddle in the obscurity, listening to what was going forward. On a sudden a fellow leapt out of the group and sprang into the main rigging.

He hove some curses under his breath at the seaman, who continued to hang in the shrouds, and went aloft, hand over fist, as good as disappearing to the eye as he climbed into the big main top. The other man put his foot on to the rail and dropped on to the deck, where some of the sailors began eagerly in hoarse hurried whispers to question him.

'Well, what d'ye see?' shouted Mr. Cocker, sending his voice fair into the full heart of the high glooming topsail.

There was no answer; but a few seconds later I spied the dark form of the man swing off the rigging on to the topmost backstay, down which he slided in headlong speed. He jumped on to the poop ladder and roared out: 'By holy Moses, then, sir, it's the devil himself! There's no man to be seen, and yet a man there is!'

'And what did he say?'

'Why,' he cried, wiping the sweat off his brow, '"Blast me, here he is again!"'

The brief pause that followed showed the captain as well as the second mate to be not a little astonished. In fact, the fellow was one of the boatswain's mates, a bushy-whiskered giant of a sailor, assuredly not of a kind to connive at any Jack's horse-play or tomfoolery in his watch on deck and under the eye of the officer in charge. The captain sent one of the midshipmen for his binocular glass, the second mate meanwhile staggering back a few paces to stare aloft. But there was no magic in the skipper's lenses to resolve the conundrum. Indeed, I reckoned my own eyes to be as good as any glasses for such an inspection as that; but view the swelling heights as I would, going from one part of the deck to another, that no fathom of the length of the yards should escape me, I could witness nothing resembling a human shape, nothing whatever with the least stir of life in it.

'Well, this beats my time!' said Mr. Cocker, drawing a deep breath.

'What sort of voice was it?' demanded Captain Keeling, letting fall the binocular with which he had been sweeping the fabric of spar and sail, and coming to the brass rail overlooking the quarter-deck.

The first of the two men who had been terrified cried out from the group near the hatchway, before the other could answer: 'It was exactly like the voice of Punch, sir, in the Judy show.'

'Then there *must* be a pair of 'em!' roared the other fellow with great excitement. 'What I heard was like a drunken old man swearing in his sleep.'

'Captain,' said I, stepping forward, 'let me go aloft, will you? I've long wanted to believe in ghosts, and here is a chance now for me to embark in that faith.'

'Ghosts, Mr. Dugdale? Yet it is an extraordinary business too. There has been nothing to hear from the deck, has there?'

'Nothing, sir,' answered Mr. Cocker. 'But Mr. Dugdale, if you will take the weather rigging, I'll slip up to leeward; and it'll be strange if between us we don't let the life out of the wonder, be it what it will.'

I jumped at once into the weather shrouds, and was promptly travelling aloft with the sight of the figure of the second mate in the rigging abreast clawing the ratlines, and the frog-like spread of his legs showing out against the faintness of the space of the mainsail behind him. We came together in the maintop, and there stood looking up and listening a minute.

'I see nothing,' said I.

'Nor I,' said the second mate.

We peered carefully round us, then got into the topmast rigging and climbed to the level of the topsail yard, where we waited for the wonderful voice to address us; but nothing spoke, nor was there anything to be seen.

'Those two sailors must have fallen crazy,' said I.

'There's no need to go any higher,' said Mr. Cocker; 'the top-gallant and royal yards lie clear as rules against the stars. On deck there!'

'Hallo?' came the voice of the captain, floating up in a sort of echo from the hull of the ship, that looked a mile down in that gloom.

'There's nothing up here for a voice to come out of, sir.'

'Then you had better come down, sir,' called the captain; and I thought I could hear a little note of laughter below, as though two or three passengers had collected.

Mr. Cocker's vague form melted over the top; but I lingered a minute to survey the picture. My head was close against the main-topmast crosstrees, a height of some eighty or ninety feet above the line of the ship's rail, with the distance of the vessel's side from the water's edge to add on to it. I lingered but a minute or two, yet in that brief space the shadowy night-scene, with the grand cathedral-like figure of the noble craft sailing along in the heart of it, was swept into me with such vehemence of impression that the scene lies upon my memory clear now as it then was in that far-off, that very far-off, time. Every sound on deck rose with a subdued thin tone, as though from some elfin world. There was a delicate throbbing of green fire in the black water as it washed slowly past the lazy sides of the *Countess Ida*, and upon this visionary, faintly-glittering surface the form of the great ship was shadowily depictured, with the glimmer of the deck of the poop dimly dashed with the illuminated squares of the skylights, and a point of scarce determinable radiance confronting the wheel where the binnacle light was showing. The ocean night-breeze sighed with a note of surf heard from afar in the quiet hollows of the canvas. There was sometimes a little light pattering of the reef-points, resembling the noise of the falling of a brief summer thunder-shower upon fallen leaves. The sea spread as vast as the sky, and you seemed to be able to pierce to the other side of the world, so infinitely distant did the stars close to the horizon look, as though *there* they were shining over an antipodean land.

'Aloft, there, Mr. Dugdale!' came dimly sounding from the deck; 'do you hear anything more of the voice?'

'No,' I answered; but the cry had broken the spell that was upon me, and down I went, looking narrowly about me as I descended.

I had scarcely gained the poop when there was a commotion on the quarter-deck, and I heard the voice of the Chinaman exclaiming: 'What sailor-man hab seen Prince? What sailor-man, I say, hab seen him? Him gone for lost, I say! Oh—ai—O; Oh—ai—O! Him gone for lost, I say!'

'Who in thunder is making that row?' shouted Mr. Cocker, putting his head over the brass rail.

The Chinaman stepped out from under the recess, and the cabin

lights showed him up plainly enough. He wrung his hands and executed a variety of piteous gestures whilst he cried: 'Oh, sah, did you sabbe Prince? Him gone for lost, I say! Oh—ai—O! Oh—ai—O! Him gone for lost, I say!' And here he rolled his eyes up aloft and over the bulwarks, and then made as if he would rush forwards.

'Is that you, Handcock?' said Mr. Cocker, addressing a stout man who stepped out of the cuddy at that moment.

'Yes, sir,' answered the fellow, who was indeed the head-steward.

'What's the matter with that Chinese idiot?'

'Why, sir, his mistress's parrot has escaped. He is responsible for the safe-keeping of the fowl, and he's just missed him.'

'Then it'll ha' been that bloomin' parrot that's been a-talking aloft,' said a deep voice from near the pumps; but I noticed an uneasy shifting amongst some of the figures standing there, as though *that* were a conjecture not to be too hastily received.

'Here, John,' shouted Mr. Cocker; 'come up here, Johnny.'

The Chinaman, who continued to mutter 'Oh—ai—O!' whilst he gazed idiotically about him with much wringing of his hands, slowly and in attitudes of extreme misery, ascended the poop ladder.

'Could this parrot talk, John?' said Mr. Cocker.

'Oh, him talkee lubberly. Him speakee like soul of Christian gen'man.'

'What could he say?' shouted the second mate, evidently desirous that this conversation should be heard on the quarter-deck.

'Oh, him say "you go dam,"' cried John.

'And what else?' cried Mr. Cocker, smothering his laughter.

'Oh, him say "Gib me egg for breakfiss;" and him laugh "haw-haw;" and him say "hook it" and "whach you wantee;" and he speakee better than common sailor-man;' and here he burst out into another long wailing 'Oh—ai—O! Him gone for drownded. Him gone for lost, I say!'

'Now you hear what this man says, my lads,' called Mr. Cocker. 'Jump aloft, those of you who are not *afraid*, and catch the bird if you can.'

The young fourth mate set the example; and in a trice a dozen sailors were running up the fore main and mizzen, where for a long half-hour they were bawling to one another, some of them feigning to have caught the bird, whilst they *kurikity-cooed* at the top of their pipes, the Chinaman meanwhile shrieking with excitement as he ran from one mast to another. But it was all to no purpose. The bird had evidently gone overboard; probably had attempted a flight with its shorn pinions after the second of the men who had been frightened had come down in a hurry. The search was renewed next morning at daybreak; but poor Prince was gone for good.

CHAPTER VI

WE LOSE A MAN

SPITE of Mr. Cocker's hints as to Captain Keeling's timidity in the matter of canvas, the old skipper evidently knew what he was about in taking in his flying kites in good time, for whilst the seamen were still scrambling in the rigging and skylarking up there in search of the parrot, the breeze freshened in a long moaning gust over the rail, with a brighter flashing of the stars to windward, and a sudden stoop of the Indiaman that sent a line of water washing along her sides in milk; and at midnight she was bowing down with nothing showing above her main topgallant-sail to a strong wind off the beam, the stars gone, and a look of hard weather in the obscurity of the horizon.

For the next four days we had plenty of wind and high seas with frequent grey rain-squalls shrouding the ship, and leaving her with streaming decks and darkened canvas and dribbling gear. It was Channel weather again, in short, saving that there was the relish of the temperate parallels in the air, whilst the seas rolled large and wide and regular, with all the difference betwixt the motion of the ship and her rollicking neck-breaking capers in the narrow waters that you'd find between the trot of a donkey and the majestical thunderous gallop of a charger.

But the wet made a miserable time of it. What was there to be seen on deck save the gleaming forms of men in oil-skins, the sweep of the dark-green surge out of the near veil of haze, the rain-shadowed curves of the canvas—the whole fitly put to music by the damp dull clattering of booms, noises of chafing up aloft, and the wild whistling of the wind upon the taut weather rigging? The males amongst us who smoked would come together after meals in a huddle under the break of the poop, cowering against the weather bulkhead out of the wet of the rain; and on these occasions arguments ran high. If Colonel Bannister was of our company, nothing could be said but that he whipped out with a flat contradiction to it. In fact, he was of that order of mind who reckons its mission to be that of teaching everybody to think correctly.

Once he endeavoured to prove to Mr. Emmett that he was wanting in an essential qualification of a painter, namely, an eye for atmosphere, by requesting him to say how far the horizon was off, and roaring in triumph because Mr. Emmett answered five miles. Mr. Johnson, after a careful look at the sea, submitted that Mr. Emmett was right. The colonel, pulling out his white whiskers, asked how it was possible that a journalist should know anything about such things. Angry words were averted by Mynheer Hemskirk, who, with a fat face and foolish smile, broke in with a mouldy old puzzle: 'Answer me dis: here iss a bortrait. I

shtands opposite, und I shay, "Brooders und shisters hov I none, boot dot man's farder iss my farder's soon! Vot relation iss dot man to dot bicture?"' The colonel had never heard this, and asked the Dutchman to repeat it. Mr. Hodder in a mild voice said: 'It is himself.' Little Mr. Saunders, after thinking hard, said it was his father. '*That's* it, of course!' shouted the colonel. The Dutchman said no, and repeated the lines with great emphasis, striking one fist into the palm of the other at every syllable. Then sides were taken merely to enrage the colonel. Some agreed with him, and some with the Dutchman. Mr. Emmett, feigning not to catch the point, compelled the stupid good-natured Hemskirk to repeat the question a dozen times over. So loud was the argument, so angry the colonel, so excited the Dutchman, and so demonstrative most of the others of the listeners, that the chief officer came off the poop to look at us.

I give this as an instance of our method of killing that dreary time. The old ladies for the most part kept their cabins; but the girls came into the cuddy as usual, and made the interior comfortable to the eye as they sat here and there with knitting-needles in their hands or a book upon their knees.

On one of these foul-weather afternoons, hearing a strange noise of singing, I entered the cuddy, and found Peter Hemskirk standing with his face to the company and his back upon one of the Miss Joliffes, who was accompanying him at the piano. He was singing a fashionable sentimental song of that day, 'I'd be a Butterfly, born in a Bower.' The posture of the man was exquisitely absurd as he stood with his immensely fat figure swaying to the movements of the ship, a ridiculous smile upon his face, whilst he held his arms extended, singing first to one and then to another, so that everyone might share in the song. The picture of this great corpulent man, with an overflow of chins between his shirt-collars, and a vast surface of green waistcoat arching out like the round of a full top-sail, and then curving in again to a pair of legs of the exact resemblance of a pegtop—standing as he was with his feet close together—I say, the sight of this immense man singing 'I'd be a Booterfly' in falsetto, proved too much for the company. They listened a little with sober faces; but at last Miss Hudson gave way, and bent her head behind her mother and lay shaking in an hysterical fit of laughter; then another girl laughed out; then followed a general chorus of merriment. But the undaunted Dutchman persevered. He would not let us off a single syllable, but worked his way without the least alteration of posture right through the song, making us a low bow when he had come to an end; whilst Miss Joliffe, darting from the piano-stool, fled through the saloon and disappeared down the hatchway with a face as red as a powder-flag.

Miss Temple was the only one of us unmoved by this ridiculous exhibition. She kept her eyes bent on a book in her lap for the most part whilst Mynheer sang, now and then glancing round her

with a face of cold wonder. Once our eyes met, when she instantly sent her gaze flashing to her book again. Indeed, it was already possible to see the sort of opinion in which she was held by her fellow-passengers by their manner of holding off from her as from a person who considered herself much too good to be of them, though the obligation of going to India forced her to be with them. Yet one easily guessed that the other girls hugely admired her. I'd notice them running their eyes over her dress, watching her face and bearing at table, following her motions about the deck; and again and again I would overhear them speaking in careful whispers about her when she was out of sight. In short, she might have been a woman of distinguished title amongst us; and if the passengers gave her a respectful berth, it was certainly not, I think, because they would not have felt themselves flattered by an unbending or friendly behaviour in her.

On the following Thursday the wind slackened, the weather cleared, and midway of the forenoon it was already a hot sparkling morning, with a high heaven of delicate clouds like a silver frosting of the blue vault, a wide sea of flowing sapphire, and the Indiaman swaying along under studdingsails to the royal yards. I had been spending an hour in my bunk reading. As I passed through the cuddy on my way to the poop I heard the report of firearms, and on going on deck found Mr. Colledge and Miss Temple shooting with pistols at a bottle that dangled from the lee main-yardarm. Most of the passengers sat about watching them; but the couple were alone in the pastime. The pistols were very elegant weapons, mounted in silver, with long gleaming barrels. Colledge loaded and handed them to his companion, occasionally taking aim himself.

She could not have lighted upon any practice fitter to exhibit and accentuate the perfections of her figure and face. Her dark glance went sparkling along the line of the levelled barrel; her lips, of a delicate red, lay lightly apart to the sweep of the breeze, that was sweet and warm as new milk; her colourless face under the broad shadow of her hat resembled some faultless carving in marble magically informed by a sort of dumb haughty human vitality. I cannot tell you how she was attired, but her figure was there in its lovely proportions, a full yet maidenly delicate shape against the clear azure over the sea-line, as she stood poised on small firm feet upon the leaning and yielding deck, her head thrown back, her arm extended, and a fire in her deep liquid eyes that anticipated the flash of the pistol.

'A very noble-looking woman, sir,' said a voice low down at my side.

Mr. Richard Saunders stood gazing up at me with the eager wistful expression that is somewhat common in dwarfs. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask the poor little chap if he had ever been in love; but he was a man whose sensitiveness and tenderness of heart obliged one to think twice before speaking.

'Ay, Mr. Saunders. A noble woman, indeed, as you say,' I

answered as softly as he had spoken. 'But how pale is her cheek! It makes you think of the white death that Helena speaks of in "All's Well that Ends Well."'

'What Hemmeridge would term chlorosis,' said he. 'No, sir; she is perfectly healthy. It is a very uncommon complexion indeed, and very fit for a throne or some high place from which a woman needs to gaze imperiously and with a countenance that must not change colour.'

'She looks to have been born to something higher than she is likely to attain,' said I, watching her with eyes I found it impossible to withdraw. 'A pity there did not go a little more womanhood to her composition. She might make a fine actress, and do very well in the unrealities of life; but I should say there is but small heart there, Mr. Saunders, with just the same amount of pride that sent Lucifer flaming headlong to——'

Someone coughed immediately behind me. I looked round and met Mrs. Radcliffe's gaze full. She was seated on a hencoop; but whether she was there when I came to a stand to view Miss Temple, or had arrived unobserved by me, I could not tell. I felt the blood rise in scarlet to my brow, and walked right away forward on the forecastle, greatly, I doubt not, to the astonishment of little Saunders, who, I believe, was in the act of addressing me when I bolted.

I went into the head of the ship and leaned against the slope of the giant bowsprit as it came in the towering steeve of those days to the topgallant-forecastle deck, through which it vanished like the lopped trunk of a titan oak whose roots go deep. The ping of a pistol report caught my ear. There was a sound of the splintering of glass at the yardarm, along with some hand-clapping on the poop, as though the passengers regarded this shooting at a mark as an entertainment designed for their amusement. Far out ahead of me, jockeying the jib-boom, sat a sailor at work on the stay there; his figure stooped and soared with the lift of the long spar that pointed like the ship's outstretched finger to the shining azure distance into which she was sailing, and he sang a song to himself in hoarse low notes, that to my mind put a better music to the flowing satin-like heavings of the darkly blue water under him than any mortal musician that I can think of could have married the picture to. There were a few seamen occupied on various jobs about the forecastle. The square of the hatch called the scuttle lay dark in the deck, and rising up through it, I could hear the grumbling notes of a sailor apparently reading aloud to one of his mates.

Presently the bewhiskered face of the boatswain showed at the head of the forecastle ladder. On spying me, he approached with the rough sea-salute of a drag at a lock of hair under his round hat. He had served as able seaman aboard the ship that I had been midshipman in, though before my time; this had come out in a chat, and now he had always a friendly greeting when I met him on deck.

He was a sailor of a school that is almost extinct; a round-backed man of the merchantman's slowness in his movements, yet probably as fine a sample of a boatswain as was ever afloat; with an eye that seemed to compass the whole ship in a breath, of a singular capacity of seeing into a man and knowing what he was fit for, most exquisitely and intimately acquainted with the machinery of a vessel; a delightful performer upon his silver pipe, out of which he coaxed such clear and penetrating strains that you would have imagined when he blew upon it a flight of canary birds had settled in the rigging round about him. The voice of the tempest was in his gruff cry of 'All hands!' and his face might have stood as a symbol for hard ocean weather, as the bursting cheeks of Boreas express the north wind. He carried a little length of tough but pliant cane in his hand, with which he would flog whatever stood next him when excited and finding fault with some fellow for 'sogering,' as it is called; and I once saw him catch a man of his own size by the scruff of the neck, and with his cane dust the hinder part of him as pretilly as ever a schoolmaster laid it on to a boy.

'At the wrong end of the ship, ain't you, sir?' he called to me as he approached in his strong hearty voice.

'It's all one to me,' said I, laughing, 'now that there's no music in the like of that pipe of yours to set me dancing.'

'Ha!' he exclaimed, fetching a deep breath. 'I wonder if ever it'll be my luck to knock off the sea and settle down ashore? I allow there's more going to the life of a human being than the turning in of deadeyes and the staying of masts *plumb*. By the way,' added he, lowering his voice, 'I'm afeerd there's going to be a death aboard.'

'I hope not,' said I; 'it will be the first, and a little early, too. Who's the sick man, bo'sun?'

'Why, a chap named Crabb,' he answered. 'I think you know him. I once took notice of a smile on your countenance as you stood watching him at the pumps.'

'What! do you mean that bow-legged carroty creature with no top to his nose and one eye trying to look astern?'

'Ay,' said he; 'that's Crabb.'

'Dying, d'ye say, Mr. Smallridge?' I considered an instant, and exclaimed: 'Surely he was at the wheel from ten to twelve during the first watch last night?'

'So he was,' answered the boatswain; 'but he took ill in the middle watch, and the latest noose is that he's a-dying rapidly.'

'What's the poor fellow's malady?' said I.

'Well, the doctor don't seem rightly to understand,' he answered: 'he's been forrards twice since breakfast-time, and calls it a general break-up—an easy tarm for the 'splaining of a difficulty. But what it means, blowed if I know,' he added, with a glance aft, to observe if the mate had hove into sight.

'A general break-up,' said I, 'signifies a decay of the vital

organs. I don't mean to say that Crabb isn't decayed, but I certainly should have thought the worst of his distemper lay outside.'

'Oh, yes,' said he; 'you wouldn't suppose that he'd need a worse illness than his own face to kill him. But this ain't seeing after the ship's work, is it?' and with another pleasant sea-flourish of his hand to his brow, he left me.

A little later, I was walking leisurely aft, meaning to regain the poop for a yarn with Colledge, who stood alone to leeward, looking over the rail with his arms folded in the attitude of a man profoundly bored, when the ship's doctor, Mr. Hemmeridge, came out of the cuddy door to take a few pulls at his pipe under the shelter of the overhanging deck.

'So, doctor,' said I, planting myself carelessly in front of him with a light swing on my straddled legs to the soft heave of the ship, 'we are to lose a man, I hear!'

'Who told you that?' he exclaimed, gazing at me out of a pair of moist weak eyes, which, I am afraid, told a story of something even stronger than his jalap and Glauber salts, stored secretly amongst the bottles which filled the shelves of his dark and dismal little berth right away aft over the lazarette.

'Why, the air is full of the news,' said I; 'a ship's a village, where whatever happens is known to all the neighbours.'

'I don't know about losing a man,' said he, striking a spark into a tinder-box and lighting his pipe with a sulphur match; 'he's not dead yet, anyway. We must keep our voices hushed in these matters aboard ship, Mr. Dugdale. Wherever there are ladies, there's a deal of nervousness.'

'True; and I'll be as hushed as you please. But this Crabb is so amazing a figure, that I can't but feel interested in his illness. What ails him, now?'

'If he dies, it must be of decay,' he answered, with a toss of his hand. 'I can find nothing wrong with him but the manner of his going. He lies motionless, and groans occasionally. It will be a matter in which the heart is involved, no doubt.'

I saw my curiosity did not please him, and so, after exchanging a few idle sentences, I mounted the poop and joined Mr. Colledge.

He was looking at the water that was passing, but not greatly heeding the sight of it, I dare say, though there was much, nevertheless, to engage the eye of a lover of sea-bits in the delicate interlacery of foam that came past in spaces like veils of lace spreading out on the heave of the sea along with cloudy seethings of milk-white softness under the surface, which made a wonder of the radiant opalescent blue of the clear profound there that was softened out of its sunny brilliance by the shadowing of the high side of the Indiaman.

'This is going to be a long voyage, I am afraid,' exclaimed Colledge, with a sort of sigh, bringing his back round upon the rail and leaning against it with folded arms.

'Not bored already, I hope?' said I.

'Well, do you know, Dugdale,' he exclaimed, whilst I caught his eye following the form of Miss Hudson, who was walking the weather-deck with Mr. Emmett, 'I believe I made a mistake in engaging myself before I started. When a man asks a girl to be his wife, he ought to marry her with as little delay as possible. Now, here am I leaving the sweetheart I have affianced myself to for perhaps ten months of ocean voyaging, with some months on top of it in India for shooting, and the chance beyond of being eaten up by the game I pursue.'

'Why did you engage yourself?' said I.

'I had been lunching at her father's house—Sir John Crawley, member for Oxborough, a red-hot Tory, and one of the noblest hands at billiards you could dream of. Do you know him?'

'Never heard of him,' said I.

'Well, he rarely speaks in the House, certainly. I had been lunching with him and Fanny; and as I was not likely to see the old chap again this side of my Indian trip, he plied me with champagne in a loving way; and when I walked with Fanny into the garden for a little ramble, I was rather more emotional than is customary with me; and the long and short of it is I proposed to her, and she accepted me. Here she is,' said he; and he put his hand in his pocket and produced a very delicate little ivory miniature of a merry, pretty, rather Irish face, with soft brown curls about the forehead, and a roguish look in the slightly lifted regard of the eyes, as though she were shooting a glance at you through her upper lashes.

'A very sweet creature,' said I, giving him back the painting. 'Is not she good enough for you? Bless my soul, what coxcombs men are! What is there to fret you in knowing that you have won the love of such a sweetheart as that?'

He hung his handsome face over the miniature, gazing at it with an intentness that brought his eyes to a squint, then slipped it into his pocket, exclaiming with an odd note of contrition in his voice: 'Well, I'm a doocid ass, I suppose. But still I think I made a mistake in engaging myself. There was time enough to ask her to marry me when I returned. Who knows that I shall ever return?'

'Now, *don't* be sentimental, my dear fellow.'

'Oh yes, that's all very fine,' said he; 'but I suppose you know that tiger-hunting isn't altogether like chasing a hare, for instance.'

'Don't tiger-hunt then,' said I, growing sick of all this. 'Hark! what fine voice is that singing in the cuddy?'

He pricked his ear. 'Oh, it is Miss Temple,' said he; and he stole away to the after-skylight, through which a glimpse of the piano was to be had. He took a peep, then bestowed a train of nods upon me, and a moment after crept below. Alas! for Fanny Crawley, thought I.

Both of the wide skylights were open, and Miss Temple's voice rose clear and full, a rich contralto, with now and then a tremor sounding through it in an added quality of sweetness. Those who were walking paused to listen, and those who were seated let fall their work or lifted their eyes from their books. Mr. Johnson and one or two others assembled at the skylight. But no one saving friend Colledge offered to go below. I could have bet a thousand pounds that the cuddy was empty, or the girl never would have sung. In fact, one took notice of a sort of timidity in the very hearkening of the people to her, as though she were a princess whose voice was something to be listened to afar and with respect, and who was not to be approached or disturbed on any account whatever. Soon after she had ended, a male voice piped up, and Mr. Johnson, after listening a little, came sauntering over to me.

'Your friend Colledge don't sing ill,' he exclaimed with the complacent grin he usually put on before delivering himself. 'Do you feel equal to a small bet?'

'What's the wager to be about?'

'I bet you,' said he, closing one eye, 'twenty shillings to a crown that Mr. Colledge and Miss Temple will have plighted their troth before we strike the longitude of the Cape of Good Hope.'

'Why not latitude?' said I.

'Why, my dear sir, don't you see that the longitude gives me a broader margin?' And the fellow was actually beginning to explain the difference between latitude and longitude, when I cut him short.

'I'll not bet,' said I; 'I have no wish to win your money on a certainty. They won't be engaged, and so you'd better keep your sovereign.'

He whistled low, and with a melancholy attempt at a comical cast of countenance, exclaimed: 'Ah, I see how it goes. It is the wish, my friend, that's father to the thought. But Lor' preserve us; my dear Mr. Dugdale, do you suppose that a young lady after her pattern would ever condescend to cast her eye upon anything even the sixtieth part of one single degree beneath the level of the son of a baron and heir to the title and property?'

'Do you recollect,' said I, 'how your namesake Dr. Samuel Johnson told his friends that, being teased by a neighbour at table to give his opinion on Horace or Virgil, I forget which, he immediately fixed his attention on thoughts of Punch and Judy? Suffer me now to imitate that great man and to think of Punch and Judy.'

'Here comes Punch, I do believe,' said he with a good-natured laugh.

As he spoke, up rose the figure of Colonel Bannister from the quarter-deck. His face was red with temper, his eyes sparkled, and his white whiskers stood out like spikes of light from a flame. We happened to be the first persons he came across as he climbed the ladder.

'Of all infernal instruments,' he cried, 'the piano is the worst.

What on earth, I should like to know, do shipowners mean by adding that execrable piece of furniture to the cabin accommodation? The moment I sit down to write up my diary, twang-twang goes that scoundrel Jew's harp; and as if that noise were not enough, a woman must needs fall a-squealing to it; and then, when I think that the row is over for a bit, and I pick up my pen afresh, some chap with a voice like a tormented hog lets fly.'

'You should write to the *Times*, sir,' said Mr. Johnson.

The colonel gave him a look full of marline-spikes and corkscrews, and walked aft on his short stiff legs to the captain, with whom I heard him expostulating in very strong language. Presently the tiffin-bell rang, and I went below.

CHAPTER VII

A SEA FUNERAL

THE doctor sat on the starboard side of the table, and I caught him eyeing me with a meaning expression that somewhat puzzled me. Once, indeed, he winked, and fearing that he might be a little tipsy and easily led into a demonstrativeness of manner sufficiently marked to catch the skipper's attention, I took some pains not to see him. Old Keeling, at the head of the table, his face shining like a mahogany figure-head under a fresh coat of varnish, was in the middle of the story of his action with the corsair in the Bay of Bengal, when Mr. Prance entered the cuddy and quietly took his seat. He fell to work upon a piece of corned beef whilst he seemed to listen with a face of respectful courtesy to Keeling's long-winded yarn, with its running commentary of 'How brave!' 'What dreadful creatures!' 'How very awful!' and the like from the ladies.

The skipper came to an end, and Mr. Prance said to me: 'A plucky fight, sir.'

'Very,' said I, watching for that twinkle of eye which his voice suggested.

'The best of an engagement of that sort,' he exclaimed, 'is that you may go on fighting it over and over again without loss of blood. By the way, talking of pirates, the captain has yet to be informed that one of them lies dead aboard his ship.'

I stared at him.

'A fellow named Crabb,' he began.

'What!' I interrupted; 'is Crabb dead, then?'

It was now his turn to stare. 'Do you know the man, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Why, yes,' I answered, 'as the ugliest creature (heaven rest his soul, since he *is* dead!) that ever encountered mortal gaze.'

'But how did you learn that his name was Crabb, and that he

was dying? for *that* you seemed to have guessed also, judging from your question.'

'Why, my dear sir,' I answered, 'you have a large company of sailors on board, and the ship is full of deep-sea voices, and I carry ears in my head, Mr. Prance.'

'Humph!' said he. 'Well, as I've always said, news travels a deal too fast aboard passenger craft. In fact, I've known passengers to pick up things which had remained for weeks afterwards secrets to the captain and mates.' He emptied a glass of Marsala and added: 'You are right in speaking of the man's ugliness. I have been to see him as he lies in his bunk.' He made a dreadful grimace and upturned his eyes to the deck above.

'Was this Crabb a pirate?' said I.

'Ay,' he answered; 'but I had not heard of it down to half an hour ago. The carpenter knew him, but held his tongue when he found him a shipmate. Now that the fellow is dead, Chips has a yarn as long as the sea-snake about him. He did business in West Indian waters; and the carpenter says that if the stories he told against himself were to be believed, no viler miscreant ever stepped between the rails of a ship.'

'But did he brag of his evil doings in the forecastle before the men?' I asked.

'No; Chips had been shipmate with him two voyages ago in a small craft, and he afterwards met him ashore in several of the low sailors' haunts down in the East end of London. When he had too much drink, he would out with the most blood-curdling tales of atrocity. No, sir; he kept his counsel aboard this ship. He knew what would have followed had his career been suspected by us aft.'

'When do you bury him?' said I.

'To-morrow morning, I suppose,' he answered. 'Captain Keeling is averse to hasty funerals. I've heard him say that when he was chief mate, a man died, and two hours later the body had been stitched up ready for the last toss; but whilst the captain was looking for his Prayer-book, the boatswain of the ship came rushing aft with his hair on end and his eyes half out of his head to report that the hammock with its contents had rolled off the grating on which it was placed, and was wriggling about the deck. When it was cut open, the fellow inside was found to be alive, bathed in perspiration and half-mad with fright.'

This conversation we had carried on in a low voice, easily managed, as I sat on his right hand close against him. A few minutes later the mate went on to the poop, and I stepped to the quarter-deck to smoke a cheroot. Whilst I was preparing the weed to light it, Dr. Hemmeridge came out of the cuddy.

'You may be interested to know,' said he, 'that your ugly friend is dead.'

'And that is what you wished to convey to me by winking?' said I.

He nodded with a smile that could scarcely be called sober. 'You took a particular interest in him,' he exclaimed, 'and so I thought I would give you the news before I made my report to the captain.'

'You are very good,' I exclaimed with a sarcastic bow.

'In fact, Mr. Dugdale,' he continued, 'I am going to pay another visit to the forecastle, as there is something in the manner of this fellow's death that puzzles me. Indeed, it is as likely as not I may make a post-mortem examination.' Here he lifted his hand and eyed it an instant. I noticed that it trembled. He immediately grew conscious of his action, blushed slightly, and spoke with a note of confusion: 'The devil of it is, the Jacks object to this sort of inquisitions. Then, again, the light forward is abominably bad, and there is too much risk when there are ladies aboard in any attempt to smuggle the body aft. Would you like to see the man? You admired him in life, you know.'

I hung in the wind a moment, then said: 'Yes; I will go with you;' and we trudged forwards.

The sailors' dwelling-place was what is called a topgallant forecastle; a structure in the bows of the ship corresponding with the cuddy and its poop-deck aft. There was a wing on either hand of it that came very nearly to abreast of the foremast, for in those times a ship's foremast was stepped or erected nearer to the bows than it now stands. Each of these two wings held a couple of cabins, respectively occupied by the boatswain, the sailmaker, the carpenter, and the cook. You entered the forecastle itself by doors just forward of the huge windlass, the great fore-hatch lying between it and the long-boat that stood in chocks, full of live-stock. It should have been familiar ground to me; yet I found something of real novelty, too, in the sight as I followed the doctor through the port door and entered what resembled a vast, gloomy cave, resonant with the sound of seas smitten by the cutwater, with a slush-lamp swinging amidships under a begrimed beam, and a line of daylight falling a little beyond fair through the open scuttle or deck-hatch, and resembling in its dusty shaft and defined margin a sunbeam striking through a chink of the shutter of a darkened room.

There was at least a score of hammocks hung up under the ceiling or upper deck, with here and there the faces of mariners showing over them, or perhaps the half of a stockinged leg, and nothing else of the man inside but *that* to be seen. There was also a double tier of bunks, which wound round from the after-bulkhead into the gloom forward, that seemed the darker, somehow, for the loom of the immense heel of the bowsprit that came piercing through the knightheads. It was a rough, wild scene to survey by that light; a blending into a sort of muddle, as it were, of hammocks and sea-chests and stanchions and dangling oil-skins and sea-boots and canvas bags, and divers other odds and ends of the marine equipment. There were figures seated on the boxes, stolidly smoking,

or stitching at their clothes; grim, silent, unshaven salts, stealing out upon the eye in that strange commingling of dull light and dim shadow, in proportions so grotesque and even startling that they hardly needed to vanish on a sudden to persuade one they were creatures of another universe. Many creaking and straining noises threaded the hush in this gloomy timber cavern. The motion of the ship, too, was much more defined here than it was aft, and you felt the deck rising and falling under your feet as though you were on a see-saw with a frequent small thunder of cleft sea breaking in.

The doctor made his way to a bunk on the port side, almost abreast of the scuttle, where the light came sifting through the gloom with power enough to define shape and even colour. In this bunk lay a motionless figure under a blanket, and a small square of canvas over his head. The bunks in the immediate neighbourhood were empty, and the fellows who swung in hammocks a little distance away peered dumbly at us, with eyes which gleamed like discs of polished steel amid the hair on their faces.

Dr. Hemmeridge pulled the bit of sail-cloth from the face of the body, and there lay before me the most hideous mask that could enter the mind of any man, saving the master who drew Caliban, to figure. Nothing showed of the eyes through the contracted lids but the whites. There was a drop in the under-jaw that had twisted the creature's hare-lip into the distortion of a shocking grin.

I took one look and recoiled, and, as I did so, a fellow who had been watching us at the forecastle door approached and said respectfully: 'There ain't no doubt of his being stone-dead, sir, I suppose?'

Hemmeridge turned from the body. There was an odd look of loathing and puzzlement in his face.

'Oh yes, man, quite dead,' he answered. 'An amazing corpse, don't you think, Mr. Dugdale? Good enough to preserve in spirits as a show for the museum of a hospital.'

'I hope,' exclaimed a deep voice from a hammock that swung near, 'if so be that that there Crabb's dead and gone, he ain't going to be let lie to p'ison the parfumed hatmosphere of this here drawing-room.'

'No, my man,' answered the doctor, looking at the body; 'we'll have him out of this in good time. But there's nothing to hurt in his remaining here a bit.'

'What did he doy of?' asked an old sailor, who had risen from his chest, and stood surveying us as he leaned against a stanchion with the inverted bowl of a sooty pipe betwixt his teeth.

'Now, what would be the good,' cried the doctor fretfully, 'of giving this forecastle a lecture on the causes of death? What did he die of? A plague on't, Mr. Dugdale! Do you know I've a great mind to take a peep inside him, if only in the interests of the medical journals.'

'I'm beginning to feel a little faint,' said I, with a movement towards the forecastle door.

'Oh well, Mr. Willard,' exclaimed Hemmeridge, addressing the man who had approached us, and who proved to be the sailmaker, 'have him stitched up as soon as you please, and then get him on to the fore-hatch with a tarpaulin over him, till other orders come forward.'

'Are ye likely to hold an inquest, doctor?' asked the sailmaker, whose Roman nose and thin frill or streamlet of wool-white whisker running under his chin from one ear to another gave him a queer sort of yearning, *raised*, haggard look in that light, as he inclined his head forward to ask the question.

'Oh, it wouldn't be an inquest,' responded the doctor with a short laugh. 'But it is death from natural causes, anyway,' added he in a careless voice; 'and so we'll go aft again, Mr. Dugdale; unless, indeed, you would like to take another view of your friend?'

I shoved past him, and got out of the forecastle at once; and never before did the sunshine seem more glorious, nor the ocean breeze sweeter, nor the swelling heights of the Indiaman more airily beautiful and majestic. In fact, I had felt half suffocated in that forecastle; and as I made my way to the poop, I respired the gushing wind as it hummed past me over the bulwarks as thirstily as ever shipwrecked sailor lapped water.

That same evening, some time after dinner, after a long smoke and a yarn with Colledge and young Fairthorne down on the quarter-deck, where we patrolled the planks in a regular look-out swing from the cuddy front to the gangway and back again, I went on to the poop, leaving my two companions to continue a game of chess in the cuddy, where they had been playing that afternoon. It was a fine clear moonless night, with a pleasant breeze out of the north-east, before which the ship was quietly running under all plain sail, saving the fore and mizzen royals, with a fore-topmast studdingsail boom still rigged out and reeling gaunt athwart the stars to the quiet heave and plunge of the ship, as though it were some giant fishing-rod in the hand of a Colossus bobbing for whales.

There were a few passengers moving about the deck, but it was too dark to make sure of them, though the delicate sheen in the air, falling in a sort of silver showering from the velvet-dark heaven of brilliants on high, enabled one to see forms and to follow the movements of things clearly. There was a deal of phosphorus in the water this night, and I stood looking over the lee quarter at the pale green or sun-coloured flashings of it as it swept into the race of our wake in fiery coils, in configurations as of writhing serpents, in fibrine interwreathings that would enlarge and shape themselves into the proportions of sea-monsters and leviathan fish.

'Is it true, do you know, that one of the sailors died this afternoon?' exclaimed a low, clear, but most melodious voice by my side.

It was Miss Temple. She started as I quitted my leaning posture and turned to her.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' she exclaimed in a changed note.

It was very clear she had mistaken me—for Colledge, for all I can tell. She was alone. Yet had she come from the cuddy, she must certainly have seen the young sprig playing at the table with Fairthorne at chess.

'I should be glad to answer your question,' said I coolly, 'if you care to stop and listen, Miss Temple.'

By the starlight I could see her fine imperious dark eyes bent on me.

'It is curious,' she exclaimed—and perhaps by daylight I should have found some sign of a smile in her face; but her countenance showed like marble in that shadow—'that this should be the second time I have asked you about what is happening in the ship. You have been a sailor, I think, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Mr. Colledge has doubtless told you so,' said I.

'Yes; it was he who told me. You share his cabin, I believe. Will you tell me if it be true that one of the sailors has died?'

'It is true,' said I; 'a sailor named Crabb died this morning.'

'Has he been buried?'

'No; that ceremony is to take place in the morning, I believe.'

'Our ship, then, will sail all night long with a dead body on board?' she exclaimed, with a lift of her eyes to the stars and then a look seawards. 'Are not the superstitions of sailors opposed to such burdens?'

'Jack does not love dead bodies,' said I, making as if to resume my leaning posture at the rail, as one interrupted in a reverie; for harmless as her questions were, I did not at all relish her haughty, commanding manner of putting them; besides, this was the first time I had exchanged a sentence with her since that night of the collision in the Channel; and the unconquerable delight I took in gazing at her beauty, that *now*, to my ardent young eyes, was idealised by the starlit dusk by which I surveyed her into graces beyond expression fascinating, affected me also as a sort of injury to my own dignity, thanks to the mood that had grown up in me through what I had said and thought of her. 'But,' continued I carelessly, 'what is regarded as a superstition by the sailor is a stroke of nature common to us all. One may travel far without meeting any person who will choose a dead body for company.'

She walked to the rail a few feet away from where I stood, and looked at the water for some while in silence, as though she had not heard me.

'I would rather die anywhere than at sea,' she exclaimed, as though thinking aloud, with a sudden crossing of her hands upon her breast, as if a chill had entered her from the dark ocean. 'The horror of being buried in that void there would keep me alive. Oh, if it be true, as Shakespeare says, that dreams may visit us in our graves—in our graves ashore, where there are daisies and green

turf and the twinkling shadows of leaves, and often the full moon and the high summer night shedding a peace like that of God himself, passing all understanding, upon the dead—*what* should be the visions that enter into the sleep of one floating deep down in that great mystery there?'

This was a passage of humour which I was quite young enough to have coaxed and have sought to improve in any other fine young woman after her pattern; but my temper just then happened to be perverse and my mood obnoxious to sentiment.

'Why,' said I, pretending to stare at the water, 'what's the difference between being lowered in a coffin and being hove overboard in a canvas sack with a lump of holystone at one's feet, when one doesn't know it? If one could believe in the mermaid, in coral pavilions illuminated with cressets brilliant with sea-fire, in those sweet songs which were formerly sung by *fishy* virgins, who swept their lyres of gold with arms of ivory and fingers of pearl, I believe that when my time came I should be very willing to take the plunge, in fact *choose* it in preference to——'

I brought my eyes away from the water, and saw her figure in the companion-way down which she floated.

A minute later, Colonel Bannister came along. He approached me close, staring hard, and said: 'Oh, it's you, Dugdale! I thought it was the second mate. Here's a pretty go! There's a man dead.'

'He couldn't help it, colonel,' said I.

'Ay, but what did he die of?' he shouted. 'I've asked Hemmeridge, and he won't give the disease a name. I don't want it to go further, but betwixt you and me and the bedpost, hang me'—here he subdued his voice into an extraordinary croaking whisper—'if I don't believe that Hemmeridge'—and he lifted his hand to his mouth in a posture of drinking. 'My contention is, they've got no right to keep the body. What's the good of it? Since Hemmeridge is mute, who's going to say that the seaman didn't die of smallpox? That's it, you see! Smallpox! and a crowd of creatures forward who are infernally negligent in cleanliness, as all sailors are, not to mention a mob of us aft who, if a plague should break out, must perish. Mind, I say *perish!* Where's that second mate?'

He impetuously crossed the deck and hurried forward on the weather side of the poop.

'Beg pardon, sir,' said the fellow at the wheel, speaking in a deep, bass, salt voice; ''tain't for the likes of me to say nothen, leastways here;' he made a step to leeward, holding a spoke at arm's-length, to expectorate over the rail, and then returned: 'but I've heerd the bo'sun say as that you've been a sailorman in your day, and I know that the gent that's just left 'ee is a sojer. And I should ha' taken it very koind if, when he told ye that we was an oncleanly lot forrards, you'd ha' called him a bloomin' liar.'

'So he is, my man,' said I, 'whether I tell him so or not.'

'I've been a-sailing in troopships ower and ower again,' exclaimed the fellow, half-stifling himself, to subdue his angry voice, 'and I could tell that there gent this—that spite of all his pipeclay and the ship-shape looks of him outside, there ain't an oncleanlier man than the *guffy*. You let him know that, sir; and if he dorn't believe it, and the capt'n 'll gi' me leave, smite me! if I won't ondertake to argue it out wi' him to the satisfaction of every party as chooses for to listen, either aft'—striking the wheel a blow with his immense fist; 'or forrards'—another blow; 'or down in the hold'—a third blow; 'or up in that there main-top;' and here he fetched his thigh a whack that sounded like the report of a firearm.

'Wheel, there! where are you driving the ship to?' shouted the second mate from the forward part of the poop; but merely as an excuse, I think, to break away from the colonel, who had now tailed on to him.

As he came rumbling aft, I went forward.

It was the most delicate gentle weather imaginable next morning when I went on deck an hour before breakfast-time to get a cold bath in the ship's head, which to my mind is the very noblest luxury the sea has to yield: nothing to be done but to strip, drop over the side on to the grating betwixt the headboards, well out of sight of the poop, where the spout of the head-pump, as it is called, commands you, and so be played on for half-an-hour at a spell by some ordinary seaman, who will be glad to oblige you for the value of a glass of grog. Oh, the delight past language of the sensation sinking through and through one to the very marrow that comes with the gushing of the sparkling green brine pouring away from one in foam back into the flashing heart of the deep out of which it is sucked!

As I passed the fore-hatch on my way aft, I observed a heap of something lying under a tarpaulin; at the same moment the boatswain stepped out of his berth.

'Have ye heard what time the funeral's to take place, sir?'

'Bless me!' cried I with a start, 'I had forgotten all about it. Small wonder that we and our troubles should be compared to sparks that fly upwards, for we are extinguished in a breath and clean forgotten.' I glanced at the tarpaulin on the hatchway with an ugly shuddering recollection coming upon me of the face of the man as I had last viewed him dead in his bunk. 'No,' said I; 'I am unable to tell you when they mean to bury him. The sooner the better, I should say.'

'True for you, sir,' he answered; 'here are some of our chaps swearing that they had bad dreams last night, all a-owing to this here dead man a-lying here. The fact is Crabb wasn't no favourite, and since he's made his hexit, as the saying is, the men want him gone for true.'

As he said this, the third mate, Mr. Playford, came forward singing out for the boatswain.

'Here, sir,' answered Smallridge in a voice like the low of a calf.

The officer crossed the hatch, taking care to give the heap under the tarpaulin a wide berth.

'Funeral's to take place at four bells, bo'sun,' said he.—'Good morning, Mr. Dugdale. All hands to be cleaned up and attend. Pity there's no more wind, Mr. Dugdale. The trades are consumedly slow of coming. Four bells, bo'sun, d'ye hear? All hands—the big ensign—four pall-bearers,' he added with a grin—'everything to be ship-shape and in Bristol fashion—to please the ladies,' he added, looking at me with one eye shut.

'Well, now you know all about it, Mr. Smallridge,' said I, and walked aft with Mr. Playford; and the breakfast-bell then sounding, I entered the cuddy and took my place.

I had thought to catch a glance, perhaps *one* glance, during the meal from Miss Temple, who might probably recollect her few words with me on the preceding evening, and her cool trick of sliding off to let me talk aloud to myself. But she never turned her eyes my way. She sometimes spoke across the table to Mr. Colledge, once inclined her fine figure towards Captain Keeling to respond to some remark of his, and occasionally exchanged a sentence with her aunt. But the rest of us might have been as much hidden as the body of Crabb was forward, for all the attention she honoured us with.

'I am glad that this funeral is going to take place,' Mr. Johnson said to me. 'I have promised a friend of mine who owns a newspaper in London a series of articles on this voyage, and down to this time I haven't quite seen my way. For what has happened proper to tell? Dash my wig! saving that collision, of which I couldn't make head nor tail, and dare not therefore attempt, what ghost of an incident good for what I may call word-painting has occurred?'

'This burial should give you the chance you want,' said I.

'Yes,' he exclaimed; 'I shall be able to do it justice, I believe. I am a little uncertain in the matter of nautical terms; and when I've finished the account of it, I should be glad if you'd listen to it, Mr. Dugdale, and correct any trifling technical errors I may happen to make. Even now, I'll be shot if I can tell the difference between starboard and larboard—never can remember, somehow. The words are so confoundedly alike, you know.'

'If I were you,' said I, 'I should not suffer ignorance of the sea-life to hinder me from writing fully about it. Few sailors read; nobody else understands the calling. Say what you like, and you need only dash your absurdities into your canvas with a cocksure brush to be accepted as an authority.'

'Still,' he exclaimed, 'in an account of a funeral at sea I should like to have the rigging right; nor in a description which,' added he complacently, 'is not likely to be wanting in some of the choicer qualities of poetry, would it be desirable, insignificant as the error

might be in the eyes of landsmen, to mistake the mainmast for, let me say, the spanker boom.'

I assured him that I should be glad to hear his account when he had written it; and soon afterwards we left the table and went on deck.

The ship was this morning a very grand show of canvas. Her yards were braced just a little forward; the weather clew of the mainsail was up; all studdingsails to port were on her, and aloft she had something of the look of a line-of-battle ship with her immensely square yards rising to the truck, the great hoist of main topsail, with its four bands of reef-points, enormously thick shrouds and big tops, and all the heavens over the bow and far to port hidden by space upon space of cloth, effulgent in the sunshine, and flinging a light of their own upon the blue air in a sort of liquid gushing of radiance off their edges, trembling into an exquisite delicacy of outline like a thinness of ice against the sky. At the peak flew the red ensign half-mast high, languidly floating in rich brand-new folds of sunny crimson to the quiet breathing of the wind over the quarter. It was a hint of what was to come, and you noticed the influence of it upon the passengers, who talked in subdued voices, and walked thoughtfully, as though it were the Sabbath and Divine service was shortly to be held. There was nothing in sight the wide and gleaming circle round, saving the shoulders of a group of huge cream-coloured clouds down in the west, looking like the mountainous loom of a snow-whitened country.

Shortly before ten o'clock, Smallridge, taking his stand upon the forecastle head, applied his silver whistle to his lips, and sent the shrill metallic summons ringing throughout the length of the ship, following it with a deep-chested hurricane roar of 'All hands 'tend funeral.' The Jacks had been off work since breakfast-time, and to the boatswain's melodious invitation they came tumbling out of the forecastle all in the spruce warm-weather attire of those days—flowing white trousers, coloured shirts, round jackets, collars lying open to half-way down their breasts, half a fathom of silk handkerchief worked up into the sailor's knot, and, for the most part, round hats of straw, shaped like a tall hat of to-day, but the crown considerably lower. They came soberly rolling along in bunches of three and four, and massed themselves forward of the gangway and round about the hatchway, and the huge pillar of mast shooting up abaft it. In the foreground stood Smallridge, with three rows of cloth buttons to his jacket, his storm-beaten face luminous with recent rinsing, and his cheeks framed by a pair of upright collars such as the negro minstrel of our time loves to embellish his blackened countenance with. Next him was the sailmaker, his small blood-stained eyes restlessly rolling themselves aft upon the people on the poop from either side his high Roman nose. By his side was the cook, a fat, bilious-looking man; and close to him the carpenter, a withered old Scotchman, with a face

of leather, puckered into a thousand wrinkles by time, weather, and trials of temper.

The first, third, and fourth mates took their place a little abaft the gangway, leaving the second officer on the poop to look after the ship. A young reefer clad in bright buttons stood at the bell, which he struck in funereal time, constantly glancing around him to find someone to exchange a grin with. When all were assembled the skipper stalked solemnly out of the cuddy, Prayer-book in hand. He was dressed as the officers were, in a long blue coat with black velvet lapels, cuffs, and collar, and white jean pantaloons. The only feature that distinguished his costume from that of the mates was the undecorated coat-cuffs; whereas the chief mate had one button on his wrist, the third mate three, and the fourth mate four. Keeling was a man of strong piety, and his manner of addressing himself to this solemn business was full of an old-fashioned awe and reverence, which one might look a long way round among modern sea captains to find the like of, in such a performance, at all events, as that of burying the remains of a forecastle hand. Most of the passengers were grouped along the break of the poop to witness the ceremony. I see that large and stirring picture very freshly even now: the mass of whiskered faces, one showing past another, nearly every jaw moving to the gnawing of a quid; Keeling and his officers in full fig; the many-coloured dresses of the ladies fluttering along the line of the poop rail; I recall the deep hush that settled down upon the fine ship, no sound to break it but the tolling of the bell and a noise of water lazily washing alongside. High above us the great squares of canvas rose in brilliant clouds, one swelling to another with a soft swaying of the whole majestic fabric, as though the vessel were something sentient, and was keeping time with her mastheads to the mournful chimes on the quarter-deck.

The bell ceased; the midshipman struck ten o'clock upon it; the Jacks on the quarter-deck made a lane, and down it from forward came four hearty seamen, bearing upon their shoulders a hatch grating, on which was the hammock containing the body, covered with England's commercial ensign. One end of this grating was rested upon the lee rail; then the captain began to read the sea funeral service. Mr. Johnson, who stood near me, stared thirstily at the scene; and methought Mr. Emmett, who was perched on the rail to windward, rolled his eye over the mass of colour that softened and brightened as the movement of the ship shifted the shadows, as though some fancies of a startling canvas to be wrought out of the spectacle were stirring in his mind. The captain paused in his delivery; the ensign was whipped off, the grating tilted, and the white hammock flashed overboard. I was at the lee rail, and glanced down into the sea alongside as the hammock sped from the bulwark. But the ocean coffin, instead of sinking, went floating astern like a lifebuoy, bobbing bravely upon the summer tumble, and lifting and sinking upon the swell as duck-like as a waterborne lifeboat.

I believe no man saw this but myself, everybody listening reverentially to the closing words of the skipper's recital from the Prayer-book. I walked hastily aft to observe the hammock as it veered into our wake, and beckoned to Mr. Cocker, who at once crossed the deck.

'See there!' cried I, pointing to the thing that was frisking in the eddies upturned by our keel, and crawling into the distance to the slow progress of the ship. 'Friend Crabb seems in no hurry to knock at Davy Jones's door.'

'I expect the fool of a sailmaker forgot to weight the body,' said he. 'Unless,' he added, with a little change in his voice, as if he meant what he said, whilst he did not wish me to suppose him in earnest, 'the chap was too great a rascal when alive to sink now that he's nothing but a body.'

'I thought,' I exclaimed, 'that wicked sailors, like Falstaff, had an alacrity in sinking.'

'I'll tell you a fact, then, Mr. Dugdale,' said he. 'I was aboard a ship where we buried a man that had murdered a negro in Jamaica. He was a ruffian down to the heels of his yellow feet, sir, with a deal worse on his conscience, in our opinion, than even the blood of a darkey. It was a dead calm when we dropped him over the side with a twelve-pound shot at the clews of his hammock. Down he went; but up he came again, and lay wobbling under the main chains. The captain, not liking such a neighbour, ordered a boat over with a fresh weight for the corpse. It was another twelve-pound shot, and down it took him, as all hands expected. But scarce was the boat hoisted when the chief mate, who was looking over the rail, sings out quietly: "Here's Joey again." And *there* lay the hammock just under the mizzen chains. 'Twas lucky a breath of wind came along just then and sneaked the barque away, for had the calm lasted, the men would have sworn that the body had got hold of the ship and wouldn't let her move. But as to our being ever able to sink it'—he shook his head, and pointing to the hammock that was now showing like a fleck of foam in the tail of our wake, he exclaimed: 'It's the same with Crabb. He's of the sort that Old Davy will have nothing to do with.'

The boatswain's pipe shrilled out again; the ceremony was over. The sailors stalked gravely towards the forecastle, the passengers distributed themselves about the poop.

'Quite worth seeing, don't you think?' said Mr. Johnson, coming up to me in the manner of a man fresh from a stage performance that has pleased him. 'Only let me be sure of my nautical details, and I believe I can see my way to a very pretty article, Mr. Dugdale.'

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE CARGO

We took the north-east trades on the Canary parallels; but they blew a very light breeze, occasionally failing us, indeed, with more than once a positive hint of a shift in the western sky, though no change happened. Captain Keeling declared that in all his time he never remembered the like of so faint a trade-wind. Indeed, it threatened us with a long passage to the equator, and again and again I would feel as vexed as if I had had command of the ship, and my reputation depended upon her progress, when I'd come on deck and find the long blue heave of the swell gushing to our port quarter, just freckled by the delicate soft wind, with scarce a ripple of weight enough to run into foam, the weather clew of the mainsail swinging in and out, and the big topsails, to the curtseying of the ship upon the swell, coming into the masts with short slaps, which made each sheet hum like a twanged harp-wire through its yardarm sheave-hole. Very different was all this from my own experience of the trades when, for days and days, from twenty-seven degrees north down to within thirty leagues of the equator, it had been one long wild thunderous spell of sailing, foam to the hawse-pipes, every yard and studdingsail boom straining at its brace as a racer at its bridle, the white water to leeward flashing past in a dazzle, like foam from the sponsons of a paddle-steamer, and all day long a fine noise of wind roaring between the masts, and on high the wool-like clouds of the trades blowing, charged with prismatic hues, transversely across the line of our course.

Yet we managed to kill the time with some degree of entertainment to ourselves. Mr. Greenhew and Mr. Riley were head over ears in love with Miss Hudson, and were beginning to talk sarcasm at each other when there were people near to listen to their conversation. Mr. Fairthorne was paying very marked attention to Miss Mary Joliffe. Mynheer Peter Hemskirk seemed to find something agreeable in the company of Miss Helen Trevor, an exceedingly fat, blue-eyed girl, with a bunch of flaxen ringlets falling before each ear, and her hair behind dragged up to a tall comb that sat in an odd staring way upon her head. There was some sport in all this for quiet observation. Then there was always a rubber of whist to be had. Though Colonel Bannister was often in too peppery a humour to play, his aristocratic, falcon-beaked wife was ever ready and eager to take a hand, and partners were never to be wanting when Mr. Adam or Mr. Saunders or Mr. Hodder was about.

Colledge and I were good friends, and had long yarns together in our cabin and on deck. It was, maybe, because we shared a berth that I was more with him than with the others, though Mr. Johnson once attempted a stroke of irony by saying that of course

my intimacy with Mr. Colledge had nothing whatever to do with the circumstance of his being the son of a lord, 'which,' added he, 'speaks well for your heart, Dugdale, for he has very many excellent qualities.'

'Mr. Johnson,' said I, 'I do not think you very brilliant as a genius, and I am sure you are not very richly stocked in gifts of satire. I would advise you to dedicate all you have in that way to your profession, lest, when you come to set up as a book-critic, you will find yourself *gastados*, as the Spaniards say—expended.'

But to return to Mr. Colledge: the characteristic I liked him best for was a certain naïveté. He would speak of his engagement with Fanny Crawley as a schoolboy might of a like experience, and not seem to know what to make of it. One day he was lying in his bunk smoking a pipe, with his leg over the edge, his head propped by his arm, his handsome face flushed by the heat, and his soft dark-blue eyes shining as with wine. I had come warm and fatigued from the poop, and lay stretched upon the deck on my mattress. We had been talking of Miss Crawley, and he had lugged her portrait from his breast-pocket to have a look at it; which indeed was a habit of his when he spoke of her, as though he could hardly persuade himself that he was engaged without first taking a peep.

'Upon my word, Dugdale,' said he languidly, 'hang me, now, if it was not for Fanny here, I'd propose to Louise Temple. She's a ripping girl, and the sort of woman my father would like; a fine stately presence for a drawing-room, eh? Figure the dignity with which she would kiss the hand of a sovereign, making the business quite the other way about by her salutation, and queening it to the confusion of every eye. My father doesn't very much care about Fanny—has no style, he thinks—nothing distinguished about her.'

'But you are engaged to her with his sanction, I presume?'

'I don't know,' he answered.

I laughed, and said: 'Has Miss Temple heard that you're engaged to be married?'

'No,' he answered with a small air of confusion; 'there was no need to tell her. What should there be in such a confession to interest her? You're the only person on board the ship that I have mentioned the thing to. Of course I can trust to *you*,' said he, soothingly.

'Trust me!' I exclaimed, laughing again. 'There is nothing wrong surely in this engagement that you should fear the betrayal of the secret of it? But since it *is* a secret, it is perfectly safe in my keeping.'

'Do you think I ought to tell Miss Temple that I'm engaged?' said he.

'Well, if you are making love to her,' said I, 'it might be as well to give her a hint that you're not in earnest.'

'Oh, but, confound it, I *am*!' he cried. 'I mean,' he added,

catching himself up, 'I think her a doocidly charming girl, and the most delightful creature to flirt with that ever I met in my life; but if I go and tell her I'm engaged——'

'Well?'

'It would knock my association with her on the head. It is not as if Fanny were within reach of an early post. Even if I were disposed to break off my engagement with her, it must take me some months to do it. D'ye understand me?'

'You mean, of course,' said I, 'that no letter can reach her under seven or eight months, unless, indeed, you conveyed one to her by a homeward-bound ship.'

'Ay; but putting the homeward-bound ship aside, Fanny could not know of my resolution—were it ever to come to *that*—until she received the letter I posted to her in India; therefore, I should have to consider myself engaged to her all that time.'

'No doubt,' said I, beginning to feel bored.

'Miss Temple would take that view,' said he, 'and that's why I don't choose to tell her the truth.'

'I don't quite follow your logic,' I exclaimed; 'but no matter. It may be that you want too much in the way of sweethearts. But so far as your secret goes, you can trust me to hold my tongue. Possibly I may admire Miss Temple as warmly as you do; see qualities in her superior even to her excellence as a mistress of postures; but I do not yet love her so passionately as not to wish to see her chastened a bit by the lesson she is likely to learn from your delight in her society.'

'I don't understand,' he exclaimed, lazily knocking the ashes of his pipe out through the open port-hole.

'Neither do I,' cried I, springing to my legs with a loud yawn. 'Heaven bless us, my dear Colledge! here are we now, I dare say, a fair thousand miles from the nearest African headland. Surely we are distant enough from all civilisation, then, to be clear of the influence of the girls! Take my advice, and keep your heart whole till you get to India. There may be a princess waiting for you there, more likely to value a tiger-hide offering than Miss Temple; whilst Miss Crawley's broken heart will mend apace when she learns that your wife has a black skin.'

'Oh, hang it all!' I heard him begin; but I was sick of the subject, and sauntered forth to see what was doing on deck.

There was very little wind; indeed, here and there about the sea were glass-like swathes riding the quiet pulse of the long, slow swell in scythe-shaped horns, as though, in fact, there was to be a dead calm anon. Only the topmost and lightest canvas was asleep; the heavier cloths hung up and down with no more of life in them than what they got out of the heave of the ship; and deep as we yet were in the heart of the North Atlantic, there was, it seemed to me, a true tropic touch in the aspect of things—in the clear pale blue of the sky; in the sluggish crawling of the clouds, with their rounded brows stealing out in a copperish hue; in the wavering of

the atmosphere over the hot line of the bulwarks, as though there was a sort of steam going up from the wood; in the parched look of the running-gear, and in the salt glistening of the white planks; in the figures of crimson-faced men, their feet naked, their arms and chests bare, again and again coming to the great scuttle butt, lashed a bit forward of the gangway, and drinking from the metal dipper.

When I arrived on the poop, I found the captain standing aft surrounded by a number of ladies, directing a binocular glass at the sea over the starboard bow. The chief mate at the head of the poop ladder was likewise staring into the same quarter, with Mr. Johnson alongside, bothering him with questions, and little Saunders on tiptoe, to see over the rail, fanning his face with a large flapping black wideawake.

I stepped to the side to look, and saw some object about a mile distant, that emitted a wet flash of light from time to time. I asked the mate to lend me his glass, and at once made the thing out to be a capsized hull of a vessel of about eighty tons. She floated almost to the line of her yellow sheathing, and the gold-like metal rising wet to the sun from the soft sweep of the blue brine darted flashes as dazzling as flame from the mouth of a cannon.

I returned the glass to Mr. Prance.

'She has not been long in that condition, I think?' said I.

'Not twenty-four hours, I should say,' he answered. 'I see no wreckage floating about her.'

'Nor I. If she had a crew on board when she turned turtle,' I said, 'she may have clapped down upon them as you imprison flies under a tumbler.'

'God bless us, what a dreadful death to die!' cried little Saunders. 'I can conceive of no agony to equal that of being in a cabin in a sinking ship and going down with her, and *knowing* that she is under water and still settling.'

The little chap shuddered and pulled out a great blue pocket-handkerchief, with which he dried his forehead.

'How long could a man live in a cabin under water?' asked Mr. Johnson.

'Long enough to come off with his life.' answered the mate, bringing the glass from his eye and looking at Mr. Johnson. 'I'll give you a queer yarn in a few words, sir; wild enough to furnish out an A 1 copper-bottomed sea-tale to some one of you literary gentlemen. A small vessel was dismasted 'twixt Tariffa and Tangier in the middle of the Gut there. All her crew saving one man got away in the boat. The fellow that was left lay drunk in the cabin. A sea shifted her cargo; shortly after she capsized and went down. A few days later, that same ship floated up from the bottom of the sea on to the shore near Tangier. She was boarded, and they found the man alive in the cabin.'

'What was the vessel's cargo, Mr. Prance?' inquired little Saunders.

'Oil and brandy, sir.'

'Don't you think,' exclaimed Mr. Johnson, 'that your story is one that would be very acceptable to the marines, Mr. Prance, but that would not be believed by your sailors were you to tell it to them?'

Here the captain, who had been slowly coming forward, accompanied by half-a-dozen ladies, interrupted us.

'Mr. Prance.'

'Sir?'

'That object yonder is a danger in the way of navigation. I think it would be kind in us to send a shot at it.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'We will shift the helm,' continued old Keeling, in the skewered, buttoned-up sort of voice and air he was wont to use when addressing his mates in the presence of the passengers, 'so as to bring the wreck within reach of our carronades.'

'Very good, sir.'

'I expect,' continued old marline-spike, 'that she is floating on the air in her hold rather than on her cargo, even though it be cork; and if we can knock a hole in her, she will sink.'

Mr. Prance stepped aft to the wheel, and the vessel's course was changed. Instructions went forward; and the boatswain, who combined with his duties the functions of chief gunner aboard the *Countess Ida*, superintended the loading of a couple of pieces.

'Please tell me when they are going to fire, Mr. Riley, that I may stop my ears,' cried Miss Hudson, who looked a very lovely little woman that morning in a wide straw hat and a body of some muslin-like material, through which the snow of her throat and neck showed, making you think of a white rose in a crystal vase.

Mr. Greenhew, with a glance full of scissors and thumbscrews, as sailors say, at Mr. Riley, told Miss Hudson that if she objected to the noise he would insist that the gun should not be fired, and would make it a personal matter between himself and the captain.

'Not for worlds, thank you very much all the same,' said Miss Hudson, sending a languishing look at him through her eyelashes; which, being witnessed by Mr. Riley, would, I did not doubt, occasion a large expenditure of sarcasm between the young men later on.

The motion of the ship was very slow, and we had floated almost imperceptibly down upon the wreck. The skipper then suggested that the ladies should go aft, and off they went in a flutter and huddle of many-coloured gowns, Mrs. Colonel Bannister leading the way, and Mrs. Hudson limping in the wake with her fingers in her ears. A chap with a purple face and immense whiskers was sighting the piece.

'Let fly now, whenever you are ready,' shouted Mr. Prance.

There was a roaring explosion; Mr. Johnson recoiled on to the feet of Mr. Emmett, who shouted with pain, and went hopping to the

skylight with a foot in his hand. There were several screeches from the ladies, and methought the whiskers of the colonel, who stood beside me thirstily looking on, forked out with an added tension of every separate fibre to the thunder of the gun and the smell of the powder. The ball flew wide.

'Another shot!' called out Mr. Prance.

Bang! went the piece. I had my eye on the wreck at that moment, and saw half the stern-post, from which the rudder was gone, and a few feet of the keel to which it was affixed, vanish like a shattered bottle.

'That's done it!' cried old Keeling with excitement as he stood ogling the wreck through his binocular. 'If a hole that'll let the air out is to sink her, she's as good as foundered.'

He had scarcely said this when there was a sudden roar of voices along the whole length of our ship.

'See! she is full of men!'

'Heart alive, where are they coming from?'

'They're rising as if they were dead bodies, and the last blast was sounding.'

'What'll they be? What'll they be?'

'Defend us! they must all be afloat in a minute and drowning!'

Fifty exclamations of this kind rolled along the bulwarks, where the sailors had gathered in their full company to watch the effect of the shot. There was no glass within reach of me; but my sight was keen, and at the first blush I believed that the hull had been a slaver, that she had capsized when full of negroes, and that our round shot had made a manhole aft big enough for them to escape through. There were twenty or thirty of them. They came thrusting through the aperture with extraordinary agility, and most of them held a very firm seat on the clean line of the keel. But every now and again one or another of them would lose his balance and slide down the hard bright surface of the yellow sheathing upon the round of the bilge plump into the water, where you would observe him making frantic but idle efforts to reclimb the wet and slippery slope.

'Monkeys, as I am a man!' roared Mr. Prance.

'A cargo of monkeys, sir!' shouted the skipper from the other end of the poop, whilst he kept his glasses levelled at the wreck.

A sort of groaning note of astonishment, followed by a wild shout of laughter, came along from the Jacks. Indeed, one needed to look hard at the thing to believe in it, so incredibly odd was the incident. One moment the wreck was a mere curve of naked yellow sheathing flashing to the sun as it rolled; the next, pouff! went the thunder of the gun, and as though its grinning adamantine lips owned some magical and diabolical potency of invocation, lo! the hole made by the shot was vomiting monkeys, and in a trice the radiant rounds of the keel-up fabric were covered with the figures of squatting, clinging, grinning creatures of all sizes, some

like little hairy babies, some like men as large at least as Mr. Saunders.

'There'll be a human being rising out of that hole before long, I expect,' said Mr. Prance. 'He must needs be slower than the monkeys if he's a man. How many d'ye make, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Some thirty or forty,' said I. 'But I tell you what, Mr. Prance: there'll be none left in a few minutes, for the hull is sinking rapidly.'

At that instant Captain Keeling sung out: 'Mr. Prance—have one of the quarter-boats manned. It is as I thought—the hull was floating on the air in her hold, and she's settling fast. We can't let those poor creatures drown. Get the main topsail backed.'

A boat's crew came bundling aft to the cry of the mate; in a mighty hurry the gripes were cast adrift, and the tackles slackened away with the men in their places, and the fourth officer in the stern sheets shipping the rudder as the boat sank. There was a deal of confusion for the moment, what with the tumbling aft of the sailors, the passengers getting out of their road, the hubbub of ladies' voices, and the cries of the seamen dragging upon the weather main-braces to back the yards.

'There she goes!' cried I; 'there'll not be many of the creatures rescued, I believe. Monkeys are indifferent swimmers.'

'Lively now, Mr. Jenkinson,' yelled Mr. Prance to the fourth officer, 'or they'll all be drowned.'

The chaps gave way with a will, and the boat buzzed towards the patch of little black heads that rose and sank upon the swell as though a sack of cocoa-nuts had been capsized out there. All hands stood gazing in silence. The drowning struggle of a single beast is a pitiful sight; but to see a crowd perishing, a whole mob of brutes horribly counterfeiting the aspect and motions of suffering humanity with their faces and gestures, is painful, and indeed intolerable. The ladies had come to the forward end of the poop out of the way of the seamen pulling upon the main-brace, and I found myself next to Miss Temple at the rail.

'They *are* monkeys, I suppose?' she said, swiftly shooting a glance of her black eyes at me, and then staring again seawards with her pale face as passionless as a piece of carving, and nothing to show that she was in the least degree moved by the excitement of the scene of drowning monkeys and speeding boat, saving her parted lips, as though she breathed a little fast.

'They are as much monkeys,' said I, 'as fur and tails can make a creature.'

'Do you suppose there were living people locked up in that hold?'

'God forbid!' said I. 'It is not a thing to conjecture *now*.'

'How could those monkeys have lived without air?'

'Air there must have been, Miss Temple, or they could not have lived. The story of the wreck seems simple enough to my mind. She was, no doubt, a little schooner from the Brazilian coast,

bound to a European port with a freight of monkeys, which are always a saleable commodity. They would be stowed away somewhere aft in the run, perhaps, as it is called. The vessel capsized, and floated, as Captain Keeling suggested, upon the air in her. Our cannon-ball knocked a hole in the hulk right over the monkeys' quarters, and out they came. I can tell you of more wonderful things than that.'

'She must have *capsized*, as you call it, very recently,' said she, glancing at me again—it was rarely more than a glance with her, as though she believed that such beauty as her eyes had entitled them to a royal privacy.

'No doubt,' I answered.

By this time the boat had reached the spot where the hulk had foundered, and we could see the men lying over the side picking up the monkeys. I ran my gaze eagerly over the surface there, somehow fancying that one or more bodies of men might rise; but there was nothing in that way to be seen. The boat lingered, with the fellows in her standing up and looking around them. They then reseated themselves, the oars sparkled, and presently the little fabric came rushing through the water to alongside.

'How many have you picked up, Mr. Jenkinson?' cried the mate.

'Only eight, sir. I believe they were half dead with hunger and thirst, and had no strength to swim, for most of them had sunk before we could approach them.'

'Hand the poor brutes up.'

Some of the Jacks jumped into the chains to receive the creatures, and they were passed over the rail on to the quarter-deck. Deeply as one might pity the unhappy brutes, it was impossible to look at them with a grave face. One of them was an ape with white whiskers like a frill, and a tuft of hair upon his brow that made the rest of his head look bald. He had lost an eye, but the other blinker was so full of human expression that I found myself shaking with laughter as I watched him. He sat on his hams like a Lascar, gazing up at us with his one eye with a wrinkled and grinning countenance of appeal grotesque beyond the wildest fancies of the caricaturist. There was one pretty little chap with red fur upon his breast like a waistcoat. Some of the creatures, on feeling the warm planks of the deck, lay down in the exact posture of human beings, reposing their heads upon their extended arms and closing their eyes.

'Bo'sun,' called Mr. Prance, 'get those poor beasts forward and have water and food given them. Swing the topsail yard—lee main topsail braces.'

In a few minutes the quarter-deck was clear again, with an ordinary seaman swabbing the wet spaces left by the monkeys, and the ship quietly pushing forwards on her course.

CHAPTER IX

A SECRET BLOW

At sea, a very little thing goes a very long way, and you will suppose that this incident of the monkeys gave us plenty to talk about and to wonder at. At the dinner-table that evening old Keeling favoured us with a long yarn about a French craft that capsized somewhere off the Scilly Islands with four men in her: how the air in her hold kept her buoyant; how the fellows climbed into the run and sat with their heads against the ship's bottom; how one of them strove with might and main to knock a plank out, that he might see if help was about, in nowise suspecting that if he let the air escape the hull would sink; how, all unknown to the wretched imprisoned men, a smack fell in with the capsized craft and tried to tow her, but gave up after the line had parted two or three times; how she finally stranded upon one of the Scilly Isles; and how one of the inhabitants coming down to view the wreck, shot away as though the devil were in chase of him, on hearing the sound of voices inside.

Mr. Johnson whispered to me: 'I *don't* believe it;' and Colonel Bannister listened with a fine incredulous stare fixed upon the skipper's crimson countenance; but the rest of us were vastly interested, especially the elder ladies, who, behind old Keeling's back, spoke of him as 'a love.'

We settled it amongst us to purchase the monkeys from the boat's crew which had rescued them, leaving the ape for the seamen to make a pet of. The matter was talked over at that dinner, and I overheard Miss Temple ask Mr. Colledge to try to secure the little monkey with the red waistcoat for her. She was the only one of the ladies who wanted a monkey.

'Would *you* like one, Miss Hudson?' said I.

She shuddered in the prettiest way.

'Oh, I hate monkeys,' she cried; 'they are so like men, you know!'

'Then, by every law of logic,' bawled the colonel with a loud laugh, 'you must hate men more, madam. Don't you see?—ha! ha! Why do you hate monkeys? Because they are like men. How much, then, must you hate men, the original of the monkey!'

He roared with laughter again. In fact, there never was a man who more keenly relished his own sallies of wit than Colonel Bannister.

Miss Hudson coloured, and fanned herself.

'I hate monkeys, too,' cried Mr. Greenhew, 'and for the reason that makes Miss Hudson averse to them;' and here he looked very hard at the colonel.

'Well, certainly a fellow-feeling don't *always* make us kind,'

murmured Mr. Riley in an audible voice, and putting a glass into his eye to look around him as he laughed.

Here the steward said something in a low voice to Mr. Prance, who looked at me, and said in a hollow tragic tone, 'Five of the monkeys have gone dead, sir.'

I called the news down the table to the captain.

'I'm sorry to hear it, Mr. Dugdale,' he answered in a dry voice; 'but you don't want me to open a subscription list for the widows, do ye?'

'Can anyone say if the little chap with the red waistcoat's dead?' cried Mr. Colledge.

'Dead hand gone, sir,' exclaimed the cockney head-steward.

'What is left of the lot?' inquired Keeling.

'The hape, sir; and the two little chaps that was rescued with their tails half ate up, as is supposed by themselves,' responded the steward.

Mr. Johnson burst out a-laughing.

'Tails eaten up!' cried Mrs. Bannister, poising a pair of gold glasses upon her Roman nose as she addressed the captain. 'Are there any sharks here?'

'I should say not, madam,' answered the skipper. 'It is a trick monkeys fall into of biting their own tails, as human beings gnaw their finger-nails.'

'And when they have consumed their tails, Captain Keeling,' said Mrs. Hudson, in a rather vulgar voice, 'do they go on with the rest of themselves?'

'I believe they are only hindered, madam,' said Keeling, with a grave face, 'by discovering themselves, after a given limit, somewhat inaccessible.'

'I dislike monkeys,' said Mrs. Joliffe to Mr. Saunders; 'but I should imagine that natural philosophers would find their habits and tastes very interesting subjects for study.'

The little chap moved uneasily in his chair, with a half-glance up and down, to see if anybody smiled.

'The monkey eating his tail,' exclaimed Mr. Emmett, 'is to my mind a very beautiful symbol.'

'Of what?' inquired Mr. Hodder.

'Of a dissipated young man devouring the fortune left him,' answered Mr. Emmett.

'Very true; very good, indeed!' cried Mr. Adams, the lawyer, with a laugh.

The death of the monkeys extinguished the scheme of purchasing them. The one-eyed ape was not to be thought of; and now it was known that the tails of the other survivors were merely stumps, the subject was very unanimously dropped, and the three poor beasts left for the sailors to do what they pleased with.

As an incident, the matter might have served for the day, so dull is life on shipboard with nothing to look forward to but mealtime. But something else was to happen that evening.

Two bells—nine o'clock—had been struck. Most of the passengers were below, for there was a deal of dew in the air, too much of it for the thin dresses of the ladies, who, through the skylight, were to be seen reading and chatting in the cuddy, with a party of whist-players at the table, Mr. Emmett's and Mr. Hodder's noses close together over a cribbage-board, and Colledge at chess with Miss Temple, Miss Hudson opposite, leaning her shining head on her arm bare to the elbow, a faultless limb indeed, watching them. The breeze had freshened at sundown. There was a half-moon in the heavens, with a tropic brightness of disc, and the ocean under her light spread away to its limits in a surface firm and dark as polished indigo, saving that under the planet there was a long trembling wake, and an icy sparkle in the eastern waters, over which some large, most beautiful star was hanging; but though there was breeze enough to put a merry rippling into the sea, the feathering of each little surge was too delicate to catch the eye, unless the white water broke close; and the deep brimmed to the distant luminaries, a mighty shadow.

The skipper was below; Mr. Cocker had charge of the deck, and I joined him in his walk. He talked of the monkeys, how the poor wretches had died one after another in the forecastle.

'I saw one of them die,' said he: 'upon my life, Mr. Dugdale, it was like seeing a human being expire. I don't wonder women dislike that kind of beasts. For my part I regard monkeys as poor relations.'

'What were the men laughing at, shortly after we had come up from dinner?' I asked.

'Why, sir, at little John Chinaman. The ape was on the forehatch, secured by a piece of line round his waist. Johnny went to have a look at him. There was nobody about—at least he thought so. He stared hard at the ape, who viewed him eagerly with his one eye, and then said: "I say, where you from, hey?" The ape continued to look. "Oh, you can speakee," continued John; "me savee you can for speakee. Why you no talkee, hey? Me ask where you from? Where you from?" The ape caught a flea. "How you capsize, hey?" asked the Chinese lunatic as gravely, Mr. Dugdale, so the men say, as if he were addressing you or me. "Speakee soft—how you capsize, hey?" This went on, I am told, for ten minutes, the men meanwhile coming on tip-toe to listen over the forecastle edge till they could stand it no longer, and their roar of laughter was what you heard, sir.'

'A mere bit of sham posture-making in Johnny, don't you think?' said I. 'He might guess the men were listening. Had he been a negro, now. But a Chinaman would very well know that a monkey can't talk.'

'This John is one who doesn't know, I'll swear. Besides, sir, the Chinese are not such geniuses as are imagined. There are thousands amongst them to correspond with our ignorant superstitious peasantry at home. I remember at Chusan that four

Chinamen were engaged to carry a piano out of the cabin. Whilst they were wrestling with it on the quarter-deck, a string broke with a loud *twang*, on which they put the instrument down and ran away, viewing it from a distance with faces working with alarm and astonishment. The mate called to know what they meant by dropping their work. "Him spirit! him speakee," they cried; in fact, they would have no more to do with the piano; and when some of the crew picked it up to carry it to the gangway, the quivering Johns went backing and recoiling on to the forecastle, as though the instrument were a cage with a wild beast in it that might at any moment spring out on them.'

Whilst he was speaking I had been watching a star slowly creeping away from the edge of the mainsail to leeward, as though it were sweeping through the sky on its own account on a course parallel with the line of the horizon. My attention was fixed on what my companion said, and my gaze rested mechanically upon the star. Suddenly the truth flashed upon me, and I started.

'Why, Mr. Cocker, what's happening to the ship? Are we going home again? She is coming-to rapidly! You will be having all your stun'sails there to larboard aback in a minute.'

He had been too much engrossed by our chat to notice this.

'Wheel, there!' he shouted, running aft as he cried. 'What are you doing with the ship? Port your hellum, man, port your hellum!'

I hastily followed to see what was the matter. The wheel was deserted, and as I approached, I saw the circle revolve against the stars over the taffrail like a windmill in a gale. Alongside, prone on the deck, his arms outstretched and his face down, was the figure of the helmsman.

'He is in a fit,' cried the second mate, grasping the wheel and revolving it, to bring the ship to her course again.

Here Captain Keeling came hastily up the companion steps.

'Where's the officer of the watch?' he shouted.

'Here, sir,' answered Cocker from the wheel.

'Do you know, sir,' cried the skipper, 'that you are four points off your course?'

'The helmsman has fallen down in a fit, or else lies dead here, sir,' responded the second mate.

The skipper saw how it was, and bawled for some hands to come aft. Such of the passengers as were on deck gathered about the wheel in a group.

'What is that?' exclaimed little Mr. Saunders, stooping close to the prostrate seaman's head. 'Blood, gentlemen!' he exclaimed. 'See the great stain of it here! This man has been struck down by some hand.'

'What's that? what's that?' cried old Keeling, bending his crowbar of a figure to the stain. 'Ay, he has been struck down as you say, Mr. Saunders. Who has done this thing? Look about you, men: see if there's anybody concealed here.'

Three or four fellows had come tumbling aft. One took the wheel from the second mate; and the others, along with the midshipmen of the watch, fell to peering under the gratings and into the gig that hung astern flush with the taffrail, and up aloft; but there was nothing living to be found, and the great fabric of mizzen masts and sails whitened to the truck by the moon, and the yardarms showing in black lines against the stars, soared without blotch or stir, saving here and there a thin shadow upon the pallid cloths creeping to the movement of the spars.

Dr. Hemmeridge now arrived. The seaman, who appeared as dead as a stone, was turned over, and propped by a couple of sailors, and the doctor took a view of him by the help of the binnacle lamp. There was a desperate gash on the left side of the head. The small straw hat that the poor fellow was wearing was cut through, as though to the clip of a chopper. There was a deal of blood on the deck, and the man's face was ghastly enough, with its beard encrimsoned and dripping, to turn the heart sick.

'Is he dead, think you?' demanded the captain.

'I cannot yet tell,' answered the doctor. 'Raise him, men, and carry him forward at once to his bunk.'

The sailors, followed by the doctor, went staggering shadowily under their burden along the poop and disappeared, leaving a little crowd of us at the wheel dumb with wonder, and looking about us with eyes which gleamed to the flame of the binnacle lamp that Mr. Cocker yet held.

'Now, *how* has this happened?' demanded old Keeling, after a prolonged squint aloft. 'Had you left the deck, Mr. Cocker?'

'No, sir, not for a living instant; Mr. Dugdale will bear witness to that.'

'It is true,' I said.

'Did no man from forward come along the poop?'

'No man, sir; I'll swear it,' answered Mr. Cocker.

'Any of you young gentlemen been aloft?' said Keeling, addressing the midshipmen.

'No, sir,' answered one of them, 'neither aloft nor yet abaft the mizzen rigging for the last half-hour.'

The old chap took the lamp out of Mr. Cocker's hand and looked under the gratings, then got upon them and stared into the gig, as though dissatisfied with the earlier inspection of these hiding-places.

'Most extraordinary!' he exclaimed; 'did some madman do it, and then jump overboard?'

He looked over the sides to port and starboard. The quarter galleries were small, with bumpkins for the main-braces stretching out from them. They were untenanted.

'What was the man's name, Mr. Cocker?'

'Simpson, sir.'

'Was he unpopular forward, do you know? Had he quarrelled lately with any man?'

'I will inquire, sir.'

Old Keeling seemed as bewildered as a person newly awakened from a dream; and, indeed, it was an extraordinary and an incredible thing. Mr. Saunders and Mynheer Hemskirk, with one or two others who were on the deck at the time, swore that no man had come aft from the direction of the forecastle. They were conversing in a group a little forward of the mizzen-mast, and could take their oaths that there was no living creature abaft that point at the time of the occurrence saving the man who had been so mysteriously felled to the deck.

'He most hov done it himself,' said Hemskirk.

'What! Dealt himself a blow that sheared through his hat into his skull?' cried old Keeling.

'I've been making inquiries, sir,' said the second mate, approaching us, 'and find that Simpson, instead of being disliked, was a general favourite. No man has been aft, sir.'

'Something must have fallen from the rigging,' said Mr. Saunders.

'Sir,' cried the captain in a voice of mingled wrath and astonishment, 'when anything falls from aloft, it drops plumb, sir—up and down, sir. The law of gravitation, Mr. Saunders, is the same at sea as it is on shore. What could fall from those heights up there'—and here he turned up his head like a hen in the act of drinking—'to strike a man standing at the wheel all that distance away?'

The news had got wind below, and the passengers came up in twos and threes from the cuddy, asking questions as they arrived, the loudest and most importunate amongst them, needless to say, being Colonel Bannister. There was real consternation amongst the ladies at the sight of the bloodstain. I shall not easily forget the picture of that poop-full of people: the staring of the women at the dark blotch against the wheel, whilst they held themselves in a sort of posture of recoil, holding their dresses back, as if something were crawling at them; the subdued wondering air of the men, restlessly looking about them, one going to the rail to gaze over, the dusky form of another stooping to peer under the gratings, a third with his head lying back straining his sight at the airy empearled spire of the cloths rising from the cross-jack to the royal yard, the mizzen-top showing clear and firm as a drawing in Indian ink against the delicate shimmering concavity of the topsail. The half-moon rode in brilliance over the main topgallant yard-arm, and the dark swell rolled in soundless heavings to the quarter, with the wake of the planet lying in the shape of a silver fan to half-way across the ocean, and not a cloud in the whole wide velvet-black depths to obscure so much as a thumbnail of star-dust.

'What has happened, Dugdale?' exclaimed Colledge, accosting me at once as he rose through the companion with Miss Temple at his side.

'A man that was at the helm has been struck down,' said I.

'By whom?' said he.

'Why, that's it,' I answered; 'nobody knows, and I don't think anybody ever will know.'

'Is he dead?' asked Miss Temple.

'I cannot say,' I responded; 'his hat was cut through and his head laid open. There is a dreadful illustration of what has happened close against the wheel.'

'In what form?' she asked.

'Blood!' said I.

'Why, it's *murder*, then!' cried Colledge.

'It looks like it,' said I, with a glance at Miss Temple's face, that showed white as alabaster to the moonlight, whilst in each glowing dark eye sparkled a little star of silver far more brilliant than the ice-like flash of the diamonds which trembled in her ears. 'But be the assassin what he may, I'll swear by every saint in the calendar that he's not aboard this ship.'

'Pray, explain, Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Miss Tempest in a voice of curiosity at once haughty and peevish.

I made no answer.

'My dear fellow, what do you want to imply?' said Colledge: 'that the man was struck down—by somebody out of doors?' and his eyes went wandering over the sea.

'It seems my mission, Miss Temple,' said I with a half-laugh, 'to furnish you with information on what happens on board the *Countess Ida*. Once again let me enjoy the privilege you do me the honour to confer upon me;' and with that, in an offhand manner, I told her the story as you have it.

'Did anybody, think you, crawl out of the hind windows,' exclaimed Colledge, 'and creep up over the stern and strike the man down?'

'No,' said I.

'How did it happen, then?' asked Miss Temple fretfully.

'Why,' I answered, looking at her, 'the blow was no doubt dealt by a spirit.'

'Lor' bless us, how terrifying!' exclaimed Mrs. Hudson, who, unknown to me, had drawn to my elbow to listen. 'What with the heat and the sight of that blood!' she cried, fanning herself violently. 'A spirit, did you say, sir? Oh! I shall never be able to sleep in the ship again after this.'

I edged away, finding little pleasure in the prospect of a chat with Mrs. Hudson with Miss Temple close at hand to listen to us. At that moment Dr. Hemmeridge made his appearance. He stalked up to the captain, who stood with his hand gripping the vang of the spanker gaff, returning short, almost gruff answers to the questions fired at him.

'The man's alive, sir,' said the doctor; 'but he's badly hurt. I've soldered his wound; but it is an ugly cut.'

'Is he conscious?' demanded Keeling.

'He is.'

'And what does he say?'

'He has nothing to say, sir. How should he remember, Captain Keeling? He fell to the blow as an ox would.'

'Ha!' cried the skipper; 'but does he recollect seeing anybody lurking near him—has he any suspicion ——'

'Sir,' answered the doctor, 'at the present moment his mind has but half an eye open.'

I made one of the crowd that had assembled to hear the doctor's report, and stood near the binnacle stand—close enough to it, in fact, to be able to lay my hand upon the hood. My eye was travelling from the ugly patch that had an appearance as of still sifting out upon the white plank within half a yard of me, when I caught sight of a black lump of something just showing in the curve of the base of the binnacle stand betwixt the starboard legs of it. It was gone in a moment with the slipping off it of the streak of moonshine that had disclosed it to me. Almost mechanically, whilst I continued to listen to the doctor, I put my toe to the thing; then, still in a mechanical way, picked it up. It was a large stone, something of the shape of a comb, with a twist in the middle of it, and of a smooth surface on top, but rugged and broken underneath, with a length of about five inches jagged into an edge as keen as a flint splinter. It was extraordinarily heavy, and might in that quality have been a lump of gold.

'Hallo!' I cried, 'what have we here?' and I held it to the glass of the binnacle to view it by the lamplight.

'What is that you are looking at, Mr. Dugdale?' called out old Keeling.

'Why,' said I, 'neither more nor less to my mind than the weapon with which your sailor has been laid low, captain.'

There was a rush to look at it. Keeling held it up to the moonlight, then poised it in his hand.

'Who could have been the ruffian that hove it?' he cried.

'Allow me to see it,' exclaimed little Mr. Saunders, and he worked his way, low down amongst us, to the captain. He weighed the stone, smelt it, carefully inspected it, then looked up to the captain with a grin that wrinkled his large, long, eager, wise old face from his brow to his chin. 'A suspicion,' he exclaimed, 'that has been slowly growing in my mind is now confirmed. No mortal hand hove this missile, captain. It comes from the angels, sir.'

He paused.

'Lawk-a-daisy, what is the man going to say next?' cried out Mrs. Hudson hysterically.

'Captain Keeling, ladies, and gentlemen,' continued little Saunders, nursing the stone as tenderly while he spoke as if it had been a new-born babe, 'this has fallen from those infinite spangled heights up there. It is, in short, a meteorolite, and, so far as I can now judge, a very beautiful specimen of one.'

CHAPTER X

THE HUMOURS OF AN INDIAMAN

THE mystery being at an end, most of the passengers, after a brief spell of loitering and talking, went below, little Saunders leading the way with the meteorolite, and the captain closing the procession, to finish the glass of grog he had been disturbed at by finding the ship off her course. I was exchanging a few words with Mr. Cocker on this second queer incident of the day, when the fellow who was at the wheel exclaimed: 'Beg pardon, sir;' and I saw him shift very uneasily from one leg to the other with a drag of the length of his arm over his brow, as though he freely perspired.

'What is it?' inquired Mr. Cocker.

'Am I expected to stand here alone, sir?' asked the fellow.

'Certainly. What! On a fine night like this? What do you want? That I should call hands to the relieving tackles?' cried the second mate.

The man sent a look up at the stars before answering, with a sort of cowering air in the posture of his head.

'One of them blooming boomerangs,' said he, 'might come along again, sir. What's a man to do if time ain't allowed him to get out of the road?'

'Your having a companion won't help you,' said the second mate.

'I dunno,' answered the fellow. 'Whatever it be that chucks the like of them things, might hold off at the sight of *two* of us.'

The second mate stood looking at him a little, and then burst into a laugh.

'Well, well!' said he; 'if there's ever a lead-line to sound the depths of forecastle ignorances, I allow there must be fathoms enough of it to belay an end to the moon's horns.'

Nevertheless, he called to one of the watch to come aft and hold the wheel with the other man, making some allowance, I dare say, for the superstitious feelings which possessed the sailor, and which were certainly not to be softened down by the sight of the great bloodstain close to his feet.

I went below for a glass of brandy, and found the passengers listening to Mr. Saunders, who, with the meteorolite before him, was delivering a discourse on that kind of stone, pointing to it with his finger, speaking very slowly and emphatically, and looking in his wistful way up into the faces of his audience. Even Miss Temple seemed interested, and stood listening with her back against the mizzen-mast, the embellished trunk of which formed a very noble fanciful background for her fine figure. However, I was more in the temper for a pipe of tobacco than for a lecture, and was presently on deck again, for after half-past nine o'clock in the evening we were privileged to smoke upon the poop. Colledge

presently joined me; but in twenty minutes he gave a prodigious yawn and then went to bed; and I paced the deck alone, with deep enjoyment of the hush coming to the ship out of the dark scintillant distance—a silence of ocean-night that seemed to be deepened to the senses by the marble stillness of the wide white pinions stealing and floating up in a sort of glimmer of spaces to the faint mist-like square of the main-royal. There was a faint noise of trembling and rippling waters over the side, and the line of the taffrail with the two fellows at the wheel rose and fell very softly to the black secret heave of the long deep-sea undulation. The cuddy lamps were dimmed, the interior deserted; there was a small group of smokers on the quarter-deck in the shadow of the bulwark conversing quietly; abaft the mizzen rigging flitted the dusky form of old Keeling, who had come up to take a turn or two and a final squint at the weather before turning in.

Someone emerged through the companion hatch, and, after looking about him a little, crossed to the lee rail, where I was standing.

'Is that you, Dugdale?'

'Yes,' said I. 'What's the matter, Greenhew? Time to be in bed, isn't it?'

'Oh, I say, Dugdale,' exclaimed the young fellow in a breathless kind of way, as though the effort to check some fit of merriment nearly choked him, 'there's such a lark downstairs—in my cabin—Riley, you know——' And here he laughed out.

'What's the lark?' I asked.

'I want you to come and see,' he answered. 'I found it out by the merest accident. Heavens, what capers! And if I don't contrive some excuse to introduce Miss Hudson into the cabin, that she may see him—— Well! well! But come along, though.'

'But, my good fellow, let me first of all know what I am to see,' said I. 'I am enjoying the silence and coolness of this deck and my pipe and——'

He interrupted me as he cautiously stared around him.

'You know, of course, that Riley's got the bunk under me?' he exclaimed in a fluttering voice, as though he should at any moment break out into a loud laugh; 'well, you can make him do whatever you like when he's asleep.'

'Go on,' said I; 'I may understand you presently.'

'When I went to my cabin to turn in,' he continued, 'I found him in bed; and imagining him to be awake, I exclaimed, just as a matter of chaff, you know: "Look out, my friend! There'll be a meteorolite crashing clean through my bunk into your head in a minute—so mind your eye, Riley!" The moment I said this he hopped out from between his sheets on to the deck, and stood cowering with his hands over his head, as if to shelter it. His eyes were shut, and I supposed he was playing the fool. "Get back into bed, man," said I; "you can't humbug me." He immediately lay down again in a manner that surprised me, I assure you,

Dugdale; for it was as full of obedience as the behaviour of any beaten dog. I watched him a little, to see if he opened his eyes; but he kept them shut, and his breathing proved him fast asleep. I thought I would try him again. "Hi, Riley!" I exclaimed. "Here's Peter Hemskirk come to haul you out of your bunk. Protect yourself, or he'll be dragging you into the cuddy, dressed as you are, and Miss Hudson is there to see you." Instantly, Dugdale'—here he clapped his hands to his lips, to smother a fit of laughter—'he doubled up his fists and let fly at the air, kicking off the clothes, that he might strike out with his legs; and thus he lay working all over like a galvanised frog. You never saw such a sight. Come down and look at him.'

'Have you observed anything of the sort in him before?' said I, knocking the ashes out of my pipe.

'Never before,' he answered; 'but I have him on the hip now. He's tried to make a fool of me to Miss Hudson, and this blessed evening shows me my way to a very pretty rejoinder. Come along, come along! Should he wake, there can be no performance.'

He went gliding with the step of a skater to the companion, and I followed, scarcely knowing as yet whether the young fellow was not designing in all this some practical joke of which I was to be the victim. We passed through the deserted cuddy, faintly lighted by one dimly-burning lantern, and descended to the lower deck, where the corridor between the berths was illuminated by a bull's-eye lamp fixed under a clock against the bulkhead. The cabin shared by the young men stood three doors down past mine on the same side of the ship. Greenhew halted a moment to listen, then turned the handle, took a peep, and beckoned me to enter. Affixed to a stanchion was a small bracket lamp, the glow of which was upon Riley's face as he lay on his back in an under bunk, unmistakably in a deep sleep. His eyes were sealed, his lips parted, his respirations low and deep, as of one who slumbers heavily. The wild disorder of the bedclothes was corroboration enough of Greenhew's tale, at least in one article of it.

'Try him yourself,' said my companion in a low voice.

'No, no,' I answered. 'I have a sailor's reverence for sleep. You have invited me here to witness a performance. It is for you to make the play, Greenhew.'

He at once cried out: 'Riley! Riley! the ship is sinking! For God's sake strike out, or you're a drowned man!'

I was amazed to observe the young fellow instantly rise to his knees and motion with his arms in the exact manner of a swimmer, yet with a stoop of the head to clear it of the boards of the upper bunk, which I considered as remarkable as any other part of the extraordinary exhibition for the perception that it indicated of surrounding conditions: whilst his gestures on the other hand proved him completely under the control of the delusion created by his cabin-fellow's cry. I also observed an expression of extreme

suffering and anxiety in his face, that was made dumb otherwise by the closed lids. In fact, it was the countenance of a swimmer battling in agony. Greenhew looked on half choking with laughter.

'Oh,' he whipped out in disjointed syallables, 'if Miss Hudson could only see him now! Dugdale, you'll have to find me some excuse to introduce her here. Her mother must attend too—the more the merrier!' and here he went off again into a fit, as though he should suffocate.

For my part, I could see nothing to laugh at. Indeed, the thing shocked and astonished me as a painful, degrading, mysterious expression of the human mind acting under conditions of which I could not be expected, of course, to make head or tail. Riley continued to move his arms with the motions of a swimmer for some minutes, meanwhile breathing hard, as though the water's edge rose to his lip, whilst his face continued drawn out into an indescribable expression of distress. His gesticulations then grew feeble, his respiration lost its fierceness and swiftness and became once more long drawn and regular, and presently he lay back, still in a deep sleep, in the posture in which I had observed him when I entered.

'What d'ye think of *that*?' exclaimed Greenhew with a face of triumphant enjoyment.

'A pitiful trick for a sleeper to fall into,' said I. 'I like your show so little, Greenhew, that I wish to see no more of it.'

'Oh, nonsense!' he exclaimed; 'let's keep him caper-cutting a while longer. I'll have a regular performance here every night. It shall be the talk of the ship, by George!'

As he spoke these words, Riley uttered a low cry, opened his eyes full upon us, stared a moment with the bewilderment of a man who has not all his senses, then sat upright, running his gaze over his bedclothes.

'What is the matter?' he exclaimed, looking around at us. 'Who has been ——'

The light and expression of a full mind entered his eyes. He threw his feet over on to the deck and stood up.

'Have I been making a fool of myself in my sleep, Dugdale?' said he.—I was at a loss for an answer.—He proceeded: 'I know my weakness. I have heard of it often enough—at school—from my mother—again and again since, Dugdale. Greenhew has brought you here to watch me. And that means,' cried he, turning fiercely upon Greenhew, 'that you have been exercising your humour upon me in my sleep, and instead of compassionating a painful and humiliating infirmity, you have——'

His temper choked him. He clenched his fist and let fly at friend Greenhew right between the eyes. Down went the Civil Service man like a statue knocked off its pedestal; but he was up again in a minute; and neither of them wanting in spunk, at it they went! It was enough to make any man die of laughter to see Riley's very imperfectly clad figure dancing and manœuvring round

Greenhew with the gestures of a cannibal at a feast-dance, yet all the while handsomely plumping his fists into his antagonist, who hammered wildly in return with a ruddy nose and one eye already slowly closing. I threw myself between them, but could do little for laughing. They fought in silence, so far at least as their voices were concerned; but the hard thumps they dealt the bulkhead as they went pommelling each other from side to side, not to mention their frequent capsizals over boxes, the flight of any objects, such as boots, which their toes happened to strike against, might well have caused the occupants of the adjacent cabins to believe that if this scramble did not signify a rush of people escaping from a sinking ship, then it must certainly mean a desperate mutiny amongst the crew accompanied by all the disorder of a struggle for life.

'For heaven's sake, stop this!' I shouted; 'consider how terrified the ladies will be. Greenhew, cease it, man. Riley, get you into your bunk again ——'

Here there was a violent thumping upon the door of the cabin.

'Anybody fallen mad here?' was bawled in the familiar notes of Colonel Bannister, 'or is it murder that's being done?'

He opened the door and looked in.

'Vot, in Got's name, iss happening?' rumbled the deep voice of Peter Hemskirk over the military man's shoulder.

The ship slightly leaned at that moment, and caused the Dutchman to put his weight against the colonel, with the consequence that the little soldier was shot into the cabin with Mynheer at his heels.

'What's this?' cried the colonel.

'I'll teach you!' gasped Riley.

'Haven't you had enough?' shouted Greenhew.

'Seberate 'em! seberate 'em!' exclaimed Hemskirk. 'Look, shentlemen, how Mr. Greenhew bleeds.'

'What on earth is the matter?' exclaimed someone at the door.

It was Mr. Emmett. He trembled, and was very pale. He had thrown his tragedian cloak over his shoulders, and looked a truly ludicrous object with a short space of his bare shanks showing and his feet in a pair of large carpet slippers. In fact, by this time the whole of the passengers were alarmed, the ladies looking out of their doors and calling, the men hustling into the passage to see, with the sound of Mr. Prance's voice at the head of the steps of the hatch shouting down to know what the noise was about. It was more than I could stand. The figures of the colonel and the Dutchman and Emmett, not to mention Riley, coming on top of the absurdity of the fight, proved too much for me. I took one look at Greenhew, shot through the door, gained my cabin, and flung myself into my bunk, exhausted with laughter, and utterly incapable of answering the numberless questions which Colledge fired off at me.

The noise ceased after a while, but not before I heard the

captain's storming accents outside my berth. I could also hear the colonel complaining in strong language of so great an outrage as that of two young men fighting in the dead of night within the hearing of ladies. The old skipper insisted on one of the young fellows quitting the cabin and sharing the berth tenanted by Mr. Fairthorne. Both vehemently refused to budge. The captain then asked who struck the first below. Riley answered that he had, and was beginning to explain, when old Keeling silenced him by saying that he would give him five minutes to retire to Mr. Fairthorne's berth, and that if he had not cleared out by that time he would send for the boatswain and a sailor or two to show him the road. This ended the difficulty, as I was told next morning, and the rest of the night passed quietly enough.

Next day, Mr. Riley put in an appearance at breakfast. On seeing me he came round to my seat, and in a few words begged me not to explain the cause of the quarrel, as he had no wish that his peculiarity as a sleeper should be known to the rest of us. I gave him my word, but regretted that he should have exacted it, as I wished to talk with Saunders and Hemmeridge on the very extraordinary manifestations I had witnessed. It was fortunate, however, that my share in the disturbance was not guessed at. The colonel, Hemskirk, and the rest imagined that I had been drawn to the young men's berth by the noise, as they had, and no questions were therefore asked me. Mr. Greenhew kept his bed for three days. It was mainly sulking and shame with him, the others thought; but the truth was his eye had not only closed, but was so swollen and blackened as to render him unfit to appear in public. He sent one of the stewards to ask me to see him; but I had had quite enough of Mr. Greenhew, and contrived to keep clear of the youth until his coming on deck made escape from him impossible.

Nothing happened worth noting in the week that followed this business. The trade-wind blew as languid a breeze as ever vexed the heart and inflamed the passions of a ship-master. It was to be a long passage, we all said—six months, Mr. Johnson predicted—and old Keeling admitted that he had nothing to offer us in the way of hope until we had crossed the equator, where the south-east trades might compensate us for this northern sluggishness by blowing a brisk gale of wind.

However, if the dull crawling of the ship held the spirits of us who lived aft somewhat low, forward the Jacks made sport enough for themselves, and of a second dog-watch were as jolly a lot as ever fetched an echo out of a hollow topsail with salt-hardened lungs. There were a couple of excellent fiddlers amongst them, and these chaps would perch themselves upon the booms, and with bowed heads and quivering arms saw endless dance-tunes out of the catgut. Many a half-hour have I pleasantly killed in watching and hearkening to the forecastle frolics. The squeaking of the fiddles was the right sort of music for the show; the Jacks in couples lovingly embracing each other, slided, twirled, frisked, polked with

loose delighted limbs between the forecastle rails, their hairy faces grinning over each other's shoulders ; or one of them would take the deck—the rest drawing off to smoke a pipe and look on—and break into a noble maritime shuffle—the true deep-sea hornpipe—always dancing it to perfection, as I would think. One such scene I vividly recall as I sit writing : a tar of manly proportions, a little way past the forecastle ladder, plain in the view of the poop, his shoes twinkling, his flowing duck breeches trembling, his arms folded, or one hand gracefully arching to his head, his straw hat on nine hairs, his face between his broad black whiskers showing out in the hue of claret, his little eyes sparkling with the enjoyment of the measures, and the perspiration hopping off his nose like parched peas ; past him a crowd of storm-dyed faces meditatively surveying him, gnawing with excitement upon the junks standing high in their cheeks in their sympathy with the dancer, or pulling their pipes from their lips with the slow deliberateness of the merchant sailor to expectorate and growl out a comment upon the capering lively ; to the right of him amidships on the booms the two fiddlers, working their hardest, and threatening every moment to topple over on to the deck with the energy of their movements. Far ahead forked out the great bowsprit and jib-booms, made massive to the eye by the long spritsail yard and the enormously thick gear of shrouds and guys ; on high rose the canvas at the fore, yellowing as it soared into a golden tinge to the westering glory that was setting the heavens on fire on the starboard beam. Oh ! it was a sight beautiful exceedingly, with the gilding of the ropes by the sunset to the complexion of golden wire, and a long line of blood-red radiance flowing down to the ship from the horizon, and making a sparkling scarlet of the fabric's glossy sides, and putting a crimson star of splendour into every window, with the sweep of the dark-blue sea coursing in long lines into the east, that showed in a liquid softness of violet past the wan spaces of the far overhanging studdingsails.

In this same week about which I am writing, Mr. Colledge, inspired possibly by the noise of the fiddles forward and the spectacle of the forecastle jinks, made an effort to get up a dance aft ; but to no purpose. Some of the girls looked eagerly when the thing was suggested ; and certainly Colledge's programme was a promising one : there was the wide spread of awning for a ballroom ceiling ; there were flags in abundance to stretch between the ridge-rope and the rail, as a wall of radiant colours through which the moon would sift her delicate tender haze without injury to the light of the lanterns, which were to be hung in a row on either side fore and aft ; there was the piano to rouse up from its moorings below, and to be secured on some part of the deck where its tinkling could be everywhere heard. There was also a quiet sea, and a deck whose gentle cradling could but serve as a pulse to the joyous revolutions of the waltz.

Colledge was enchanted with his scheme, and went about

thirstily in the prosecution of it; but, as I have said, to no purpose. Colonel Bannister shouted with derision when asked if he would dance; Greenhew was not yet well of his eye, was extremely sulky, and hung about in retired places; Riley called dancing a bore; Fairthorne pleaded tender feet; little Saunders smote his breast to Colledge's inquiry and said plaintively: 'Who would stand up with *me*?' In short, every man-jack of us aft, saving Mr. Johnson and myself, declined to take any active part in the proposed ball; and Colledge, with a face of loathing, abandoned the idea, vowing to me that he had never met with such a pack of scarecrows in his life, and that we should have been better off in the direction of jollity and companionship had the cargo of monkeys been spared to take the place of our male passengers.

Thus did we somewhat wearily roll our way through the Atlantic parallels, fanned by a light north-east wind over the quarter, under a heaven of blue, with the sun in the midst of it splendidly shining, and a night-sky of airy indigo rich with stars from sea-line to sea-line. The flying-fish shot from the coppered sides of the Indiaman, but saving them and ourselves, the ocean was tenantless of life; we sighted no ship; no bird hovered near us; once only, when it was drawing near to midnight, I heard the sounds of a deep respiration off one or the other of the bows—the noise of some leviathan of the deep rising from the dark profound to blow his fountain under the stars; but there was no shadow of it to be seen nor break of white waters to indicate its neighbourhood. It was but a single sigh, deep and solemn, as though Old Ocean himself had delivered it out of his heart, and the glittering heights seemed to gather a deeper mystery from the mere note of it.

CHAPTER XI

A STRANGE SAIL

It was a Friday morning. On going on deck before breakfast for a pump-bath in the ship's head, I found as queer a look of weather all about as ever I had witnessed in my life. A troubled swell, but without much height or power, was running from the westwards, and the Indiaman rolled awkwardly upon it with much noise of beating canvas aloft and of straining spars. The water was of a dull olive tint, with an appearance of mud in it, as though some violent disturbance at bottom had lifted the ooze cloudily to the surface. It was hard to tell whether the sky was blue or slate, so thick, dusty, impervious was it, with here and there a dim outline of cloud, and patches, so to speak, of a kind of yellowish blue, where some belly of obscured vapour stooped lower than the rest; whilst, the whole sea-circle round, there hovered an immense

grummet or ring of a dingy, sooty appearance, like to a line of smoke left by the funnels of steamers, and hanging in a brown cloud, leagues in length, in silent motionless weather on the rim of the waters of the English Channel.

'Hallo, Mr. Smallridge,' said I, as I stepped over the rail out of the head, addressing the boatswain, who was superintending the work of a couple of hands slung over the bow, 'what have we yonder?' and I sent my gaze at a sail I had now for the first time caught sight of that was hovering down upon our port quarter some two or three miles distant.

'A brig, sir, I believe,' he answered; 'she was in sight much about the same place at daybreak. There's been a little air of wind, but it's failing, I doubt.'

'Making way for something to follow, I fancy?' said I, casting a look round the horizon.

'Ay,' he answered; 'that muck's a-drawing up, and there'll be thunder in it too, if my corns speaks right. Niver had no such aching in my toes as this morning since last Toosday was two year, when we fell in off the Hope with the ugliest thunderstorm that I can remember south of the heequator. When my corns begins to squirm I always know that thunder ain't fur off.'

'Well, thunder or no thunder,' said I, 'I hope there's to come wind enough in the wake of all this to blow us along. We shall be having to call it sixty days to the Line, bo'sun, if we don't mind our eye;' and giving him a friendly nod, I made my way to my cabin to finish dressing.

The gloomy appearance continued all the morning without the least change. The wind fell dead; and a prodigious hush overhung the sea, a stillness that grew absolutely overwhelming to the fancy, if you gave your mind to it, and stood watching the heave of the swell running in ugly green heaps without a sound. Noises were curiously distinct. The voice of a man hailing the forecastle from the foretopmast crosstrees sounded on the poop as though he had called from the maintop. A laugh from near the wheel had a startlingly near note, though it came to you along the whole length of the after-deck. The water brimming to the channels alongside to the stoop of the hull sent the oddest hollowest sobbing tone into the air, as though some monster were strangling alongside. Halliards had been let go and sails clewed up and hauled down, and the *Countess Ida* lay with something of a naked look as she wallowed with the clumsiness of a wide-beamed ship under topsails and forecourse; and all the rest of the square canvas, saving the royals and mizzen topgallant-sail, which were furled, swinging in and out festooned by the grip of the gear.

By noon the sail that I had noticed early that morning had neared us in some insensible fashion till she hung something more than a mile away off the quarter as before. I had several times examined her with the telescope and was not a little impressed by her appearance. She was a brig of about two hundred and sixty

tons ; a most beautiful and perfect model indeed, with a clipper lift of bow and a knife-like cutwater and a long wonderfully graceful arching sweep of side rounding into the very perfection of a run. Her copper came high, and was very clean, as though she were fresh from port. Her masts were singularly lofty for her size, both of them tapering away into skysail poles with yards across ; but she had furled all canvas down to her two topsails and foresail, and lay rolling heavily, lifting her symmetrical fabric to the height of the swell, when she would be hove out against the ugly sulky background in such keen relief that her rigging glanced like hairs as it came from the mastheads to the channels, with a white, odd, almost ghastly stare in her canvas that was brilliant as cotton ; then down she would sink behind some sullen almost livid peak till she was hidden to the reef-band of her fore-course.

Throughout the morning I had observed Captain Keeling some what restlessly examining her ; that is to say, he would send looks enough at her through his binocular glass to suggest that he found something unusual, perhaps disturbing, in her appearance. There were no sights to be had, though the old fellow and his two mates stood about the decks, sextants in hand, occasionally lifting their eyes to that part of the sky where the sun was supposed to be. Observing Mr. Prance at the rail, steadfastly observing the brig down upon the quarter, I went up to him.

'Pray what do you find in that craft yonder, Mr. Prance, to interest you? The skipper does not seem able to keep his glass off her.'

'What do *you* see, Mr. Dugdale?' he answered, viewing me out of the corners of his eyes without turning his head. 'Come, you have been a sailor. What is *your* notion of her?'

'She's a beauty, anyway,' I answered ; 'no builder's yard ever turned out anything sweeter in the shape of a hull—a trifle too lofty, perhaps. For my part, I hate everything above royals. Give me short mastheads, the royal-yard sitting close under the truck, English frigate-fashion——' I was proceeding.

'No, no ; I don't mean that, Mr. Dugdale,' he interrupted with a hint of a seaman's impatience at my criticism.

'What, then?' I asked.

'Does she look honest, think you?' said he.

'Ha!' cried I : 'now I understand.'

'Hush! not a word, if you please,' he exclaimed with a glance along the poop ; 'the ladies must on no account be frightened, and it is but a mere suspicion on Captain Keeling's part at best. Yet he has had some acquaintance with gentry of her kind, if, indeed, yonder chap be of the denomination he conjectures.'

'She must have been stealthily sneaking down upon us,' I exclaimed, 'to occupy her present position, otherwise she should be a league distant out on the beam. But then such a hull as that must yield to a catspaw that wouldn't blow a feather out of the *Countess Ida's* mizzen-top. What has been seen to excite misgiving, Mr. Prance?'

'Too many of a crew, sir,' he answered; 'the outline of a long-tom on her forecastle, but ill-concealed by the raffle thrown over it. Six guns of a side, Mr. Dugdale, though the closed ports hide their grins.'

'She will not attempt anything with a big chap like us, surely.'

At that moment the captain called him, and he walked aft.

Presently, it sensibly darkened, as though to the passage of some denser sheet of vapour crawling through the heart of the obscurity on high. The sea turned of an oil-like smoothness, and ran in folds as of liquid bottle-green glass out of the grimy shadow that was slowly thickening all away round the ocean limit. The order was given to furl the clewed-up sails and to reef the topsails. The boatswain's pipe summoned all hands to this work, and the ship for a while was full of life and commotion. However, by this time the secret of old Keeling's uneasiness had in some way leaked out; in fact, the skipper could no longer have kept the people in ignorance of his suspicions; for some ten minutes or so before the tiffin-bell rang, after the hands had come down from aloft, the order was quietly sent along to see all clear for action; and as I took my seat at table, being close to the cuddy front, as my chair brought me with a clear view of the quarter-deck through the open windows, I could observe the men preparing our little show of carronades, removing the tompions, placing rams, sponges, train-tackles, and the like at hand, and passing shot and chests of small-arms through the main hatch.

Captain Keeling, stiff, and bolstered up as usual in his brass-buttoned frock coat, his face of a deeper rubicund from some recent touch of soap and towel, seated himself at the head of the table; but Prance and the other mates remained on deck. One noticed a deal of uneasiness amongst the ladies, saving Miss Temple, whose haughty beautiful face wore its ordinary impassive expression. There was no coquetry in the startled eyes that Miss Hudson rolled around. Mrs. Bannister fanned herself vehemently, and ate nothing. There were some of us males, too, who looked as if we didn't like it. Mr. Emmett was exceedingly thoughtful; Mr. Fairthorne drank thirstily, and pulled incessantly at his little sprouting moustache; Mr. Hodder watched old Keeling continuously; and Mr. Riley made much of his eye-glass. Nothing to the point was said for a little while; then the colonel rapped out:

'I say, captain, have you any notion as to the nationality of that chap whom your people are making ready to resist?'

'No, sir,' answered Keeling stiffly; 'we gave her a sight of our ensign this morning; but she showed no colours in return, and I am not a man to keep my hat off to one who will not respond.'

'Dot iss my vay,' exclaimed Peter Hemskirk, bestowing a train of nods on the skipper.

'But, captain,' said Mrs. Joliffe, a nervous, gentle-faced, middle-aged lady, with soft white hair, 'have you any good reason for supposing that the ship may prove dangerous to us?'

'Madam,' responded Keeling with a bow, and you noticed the prevailing condition amongst us by the general nervous inclining of ears towards the old fellow to catch what he said, 'there is reason to believe that certain Spaniards of the island of Cuba have equipped two or three smart vessels to act the part of marine highwaymen. The authorities wink at the business, I am told. Their practice is to bring ships to and board them, and plunder the best of what they may come across. Last year, a West Indiaman named the *Jamaica Belle* was overhauled by one of these craft, who took specie amounting to twelve thousand pounds out of her. I believe they are not cut-throats in the old piratic sense.'

'Oh, don't speak of cut-throats!' cried Mrs. Hudson. 'Will they dare to attack us—the monsters!'

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Keeling, 'pray, clearly understand: my suspicions of the stranger may be ill-founded. Meanwhile, our business is to put ourselves in a posture of defence, ready for whatever may happen.'

'Certainly,' exclaimed the colonel very emphatically with a look round; and then speaking with his eyes fixed upon Mr. Johnson; 'I presume we shall be able to count upon all our male friends here assembled to assist your crew to the utmost of their powers, should the stranger make any attempt upon this ship?'

'We shall expect you to cover yourself with glory, colonel,' said Mr. Johnson, in a familiar sarcastic voice; 'and I shall be happy to write and print a full description of your behaviour, sir.'

'I am quite willing to fight,' exclaimed Mr. Fairthorne in an effeminate voice. 'I mean that I thall be glad to thoot; but I am no thwordthman.'

'Possengers hov no beesness to vight,' exclaimed Mynheer Hemskirk, enlarging his immense waistcoat by obtruding his chest; 'dey gets in der vay of dem as knows vot to do.'

Miss Temple bit her lip to conceal a smile.

'That's all very well,' exclaimed Riley, talking at Miss Hudson; 'but suppose, Hemskirk, you should find some greasy Spaniard with earrings and oily ringlets rifling your boxes, hauling out all the money you've got, pocketing that fine silver-mounted meerschaum pipe of yours——'

'I vould coot orff hiss head,' answered the Dutchman, breathing hard.

'Gentlemen, you are unnecessarily alarming the ladies,' cried old marline-spike from the head of the table.

'I suppose there's no lack of small-arms with you, captain?' roared the colonel; 'plenty for us here as well as for your men?'

'I shall insist upon your not meddling, Edward, in whatever may happen,' cried his wife, giving him an emphatic nod over the edge of her fan with her Roman nose.

'I shall meddle, then, my dear,' he shouted. 'If it comes to those rascals attacking us, I shall fight, as of course we all will,' and again he bent his little fiery eyes upon Mr. Johnson.

'My note-book is ready, colonel,' said Mr. Johnson pleasantly, with a satirical grin at the peppery little soldier. 'I'll not lose sight of you, sir.'

'I believe you will then, sir,' sneered the colonel, 'unless Captain Keeling takes the precaution to clap his hatches on to prevent anybody skulking below from off the deck.'

'Mere bluster is not going to help us,' said Colledge, who disliked the colonel; 'no good in railing and storming like heroes in a blank-verse performance for an hour at a time before falling to. If Captain Keeling wants any assistance outside that of his crew, he may command me for one.'

'I wath never taught fenthing,' said Mr. Fairthorne; 'if I fight, it mutht be with a muthket.'

'If the ship should be captured, what's to become of us?' cried Mrs. Hudson. 'I've read the most barbarous histories about pirates. They have no respect for sex or age; and it's quite common, I've heard, for every pirate to have twelve wives.'

Here Mrs. Trevor suddenly shrieked out for someone to bring her baby to her, then went into hysterics, and was presently carried away in a dead faint by the stewards, followed by her daughter, weeping bitterly. Old Keeling whipped out an oath.

'Now, gentlemen,' he exclaimed, 'you see what your conversation has brought about. Ladies, I beg that you will not be uneasy. The stranger will give us no trouble, I am persuaded;' and rising with a look of contempt, he bowed stiffly to Miss Temple and her aunt, and went on deck.

I was too curious to observe what was going forward to linger in the cuddy amid this idle rattle of tongues. Our ship having no steerage-way, had slewed to the beat of the swell, and the brig was now off the starboard bow, pretty much distant as she had been when we went to lunch, but showing out with amazing clearness against the sooty sky past her, upon which her topsails swung from side to side so heavily that the lower yardarms at times seemed to spear the water lifting to them in hills. All over and beyond her lay a deep shadow of thunder, a sky scowling to the zenith thick as though viewed through a dust-storm, with a vision of the tufted cloud of the electric tempest hovering here and there; but there was no lightning as yet, no echo of distant grumbling; there was not a breath of air to cool the moistened lip, and the noiseless heave of the swell was as though Old Ocean lay breathing hard in a posture of dumb expectation.

Our crew hung about the decks in groups ready to spring to the first command. Iron stanchions had been fitted into the line of the rails, and boarding-nets triced up the length of the ship from just before the fore-rigging to the poop rail. Aft was a small gang of seamen stationed at each gun there, with all necessary machinery for the artillery at hand. The captain, the chief mate, and Mr. Cocker stood abreast of the wheel, looking at the brig with an occasional glance round the sea at the weather. I stepped to the

side to take another view of the stranger, and I was noticing with admiration the toy-like beauty of her as she soared with ruddy sheathing to the head of a swell, with now and again a most delicate echo of the clapping and beating of her canvas stealing to us through the dark, breathless atmosphere, when I was accosted by someone at my elbow.

'Do you think it possible, Mr. Dugdale, that if that vessel fired at our ship she could hit us, so violently rolling as she is?'

I turned. It was Mrs. Radcliffe, and with her was Miss Temple. With the exception of a 'Good-morning' or a 'Good-night,' I had never exchanged a syllable with this lady in all the time that she and I had been together on shipboard. Her kind little face fluttered jerkily at me as she asked the question in a manner to remind one of the movements of the head of a hen. Miss Temple stood like a statue, swaying to the majestic perpendicular of her figure upon the rolling deck without the least visible effort to keep her balance, her dark and shining eyes fixed upon the brig.

'Her gunners,' said I, 'would need to be practised marksmen, I should say, to hit us from such a tumbling platform as that yonder.'

'Just my opinion, as I told you, Louise,' she exclaimed.

'If she were to begin to fire,' exclaimed the girl, keeping her gaze bent seawards, 'she would be sure to hit us, though it were by chance.'

'Very possibly,' said I.

'There will be some wind soon, I think, don't you?' said Mrs. Radcliffe.

'I hope so,' I answered.

'In that case,' said she, 'we shall be able to sail away and escape, shan't we?'

'She will chase us,' exclaimed Miss Temple; 'and as she sails faster than we do, she will catch us!'

'Now, is that likely?' cried Mrs. Radcliffe, with a nervous toss of her head at me.

'Everything is possible at sea,' said I, laughing; 'but there is a deal in our favour, Mrs. Radcliffe: first the weather, that as good as disables that fellow at present, anyway; then the coming on of the night, with every prospect of losing the brig in the darkness.'

'Would you advocate our running away from him?' exclaimed Miss Temple, looking at me with a fulness and firmness that was as embarrassing and vexing in its way as an impertinent stare.

'Oh, yes,' said I; 'certainly. We are a peaceful trader. It is our business to arrive in India sound in body——'

'I should consider,' said she, gazing at me as if she would subdue me into acquiescence in anything she chose to say by merely eyeing me strenuously, 'that Captain Keeling would be acting the part of a coward if he ran away from that little vessel.'

'Oh, Louise, how can you talk so!' cried Mrs. Radcliffe, with a sort of despairful toss of her hands.

'I should like to see a fight between two ships,' said the girl, removing her overbearing eyes from my face to send them over the deck amongst the groups of men. 'Of course, if that vessel attacks us, we ladies will be sent below to rend the cabin with our screams at every broadside; but I, for one, am perfectly willing, if the captain consents, to shoot at those people through a port-hole.'

'Oh, Louise, the whims which possess you are really dreadful!' cried Mrs. Radcliffe: 'imagine, if you should even wound a man! it would make you miserable for life; perhaps end in your becoming a Roman Catholic and going into a convent. Think of that.'

Miss Temple looked at her aunt with a little curl of her lip.

'I do not know,' she exclaimed, 'why it should be more dreadful in a woman to defend her life than in a man. Nobody, I suppose, wishes to hurt those people; but if they attempt to hurt us, why should we women feel shocked at the notion of our helping the sailors to protect the ship by any means in our power? I am like Mr. Fairthorne,' she continued, with a sarcastic glance at me; 'I could not fight with a sword, but I can certainly pull the trigger of a musket.'

'It is really hardly lady-like, my dear,' began Mrs. Radcliffe.

'Nonsense, aunt! Lady-like! Is it more genteel to fall into hysterics and swoon away, than to take aim at a wicked wretch who will have your life if you don't take his?' and as she said this, she whipped a cotton umbrella out of her aunt's hand, and putting it to her shoulder, as though it were a gun, levelled it at the brig.

Colledge, who was standing at a little distance away, talking to two or three of the passengers, clapped his hands and laughed out. For my part, I could not take my eyes off her, so fascinating were the beauties of her fine form in that posture, her head drooped in the attitude of the marksman, and her marble-like profile showing out clear as a cutting in ivory against the soft shadowy mass of gloom of the sky astern.

Mrs. Radcliffe again tossed her arms in a despairful gesture, with a pecking, so to speak, of her face at the gangs of men on the quarter-deck and waist; and then making a little flurried snatch at her umbrella, she passed her arm through her niece's, exclaiming: 'Help me to reach the cuddy, my dear. There's a thunderstorm brewing, I'm sure, and I'm afraid of lightning.' She made me a little staggering curtsey, and walked with Miss Temple to the companion, down which the pair of them went, followed by Mr. Colledge, who I could hear complimenting Miss Temple on her resolution to fight the enemy, if the stranger should prove one.

A few minutes later Mr. Emmett and Mr. Johnson approached me, bumping against each other like a brace of lighters in a sea-way as they struck out on the swaying deck with their staggering legs.

'I say, Dugdale,' cried the journalist, 'shall you fight?'

'Why, yes,' I answered. 'We shall all be expected to help the crew, certainly.'

'I don't see that!' exclaimed Mr. Emmett, drawing his wide-awake down to his nose and folding his arms with a tragic gesture upon his breast, whilst he swung his figure from side to side on wide-stretched legs. 'It's all very fine to expect; but I agree with Johnson, whose argument is, that we have paid our money to be transported in safety to Bombay; and I cannot for the life of me see that the captain has any right to look for co-operation at our hands, unless, indeed, he so contrives it as to enable us to help him without imperilling our lives.'

'But that fellow yonder may be full of ruffians, Emmett,' said I; 'and if you do not help our sailors to defend the *Countess Ida*, they may board us; and then they will cut your throat,' I added, with a look at his long neck, 'which is no very agreeable sensation, I believe, and an experience quite worth a pinch of heroism to evade.'

'It's a beastly business altogether,' said he, wrinkling his nose as he stared at the brig.

'But why should they board us?' exclaimed Mr. Johnson. 'If they do, it will be the captain's fault. Why does he want to go on sticking *here* for, as if, by George! we were a man-of-war with three decks bristling with guns and crammed to suffocation with men?'

'There is no wind,' said I; 'and without wind, Johnson, ships cannot sail.'

'Then why the confounded dickens don't he lower all the boats,' he cried, 'and fill them with sailors, and tug the ship out of sight of that beast there?'

I laughed outright.

'Well, I'm not in the habit of using strong language,' said Mr. Emmett, scowling at the brig; 'but curse me if I'm going to fight. My simple contention is, I've paid my money to be transported peacefully to India; and,' added he, with a glance aft at old Keeling, who was staring up at the sky, as though to observe if there were any drift in the vapour up there, 'if he don't fulfil his undertaking, I'll sue him or his owners for breach of contract.'

'I'm no sailor,' exclaimed Mr. Johnson, 'but I may claim to have some intelligence as a landsman, and my argument is,' he cried, talking in a loud voice, 'that it is quite in Captain Keeling's power to launch the boats and drag the ship away from this spot. In an hour the brig would be out of sight.'

At that instant there was a flash of lightning that made a crimson dazzle of the dark heavens beyond the brig, where the sky sloped in a horrible yellowish slate colour into the sooty thickness which circled the horizon.

'Ha!' cried Mr. Emmett, 'I don't like lightning;' and he abruptly trundled down the poop ladder to the quarter-deck and disappeared.

'Here's a mess to be in!' grumbled Johnson. 'It's all very well

to shoot or be shot at if you make butchery a profession. But to be maimed or killed in some cheap affray—having to fight for people you don't care a hang about—obliged, for instance, to jeopardise your eyes, your limbs, perhaps your very existence, for an old woman like Mrs. Bannister, when the business is not in one's line at all——' He clenched his fist, and, fetching his thigh a whack with it, exclaimed: 'Let little hectoring Colonel Cock-a-doodle-doo cut as many throats as he can come at—I am a man of peace. I have parted with a large sum to get to India in comfort; and to expect me to help the sailors to fight is as monstrous as to look to me to assist them in furling the sails and scrubbing the decks.'

Thus speaking, he followed Mr. Emmett down on to the quarter-deck.

CHAPTER XII

A STORM OF WIND

THE atmosphere now took a deeper tinge of gloom. Thunder had followed the blaze of lightning in the west, low, distant, but continuous, like a rapid succession of the batteries of several ships of war heard from afar; and as the echoes of this ominous growling swept to our ears over the glass-smooth heave of the swell, the fresh dye of gloom came into the day and made an evening darkness of the afternoon.

The noise of the thunder had been like calling a hush upon the ship. The men hung in silent groups along the decks; motionless at the wheel was the tall form of a powerful sailor gripping the spokes with an iron clutch that was scarcely to be shaken by the frequent hard drag of the tiller-gear to the kick of the rudder; the seamen stationed at the guns aft stood with folded arms or hands carelessly thrust into their pockets gazing at the brig, or, with the impatient looks of sailors, kept idly waiting on deck during their watch below, directing glances at the horizon or the sky, as though in search of some sign of wind. The three mates continued to overhang the rail near the captain, who walked the length of a plank to and fro with a telescope under his arm, which he would sometimes level at the brig, afterwards addressing his officers in a low voice.

All the ladies were below; but shortly after Mr. Johnson had left me, Miss Temple came on deck and went to the side to look at the stranger, and there lingered, with her gaze upon the western sky, over which the lightning was now running in fluid lines, a cascading of fiery streaks with a frequent dull opening blaze low down, which the heads of the swell would catch and mirror as though it were an instant gleam of sunset. Had she condescended to glance my way, I should have joined her. She loitered a while

and then left the deck ; and at the same moment the second mate came forward to the break of the poop and called out an order for the foresail and mizzen-topsail to be furled and the foretopsail to be close reefed.

'Very unpleasant state of suspense this,' said little Mr. Saunders, stealing to my side and looking up into my face.

'Very,' I answered ; 'but it seems as if the weather was to extinguish our anxiety as regards the brig.'

'Yes,' said he. 'I heard the captain tell Mr. Prance that he believes there is a gale of wind behind that storm yonder. Gracious me ! what a very vivid flash. Hark ! it nears us quickly.'

There was a rattling peal of thunder now, a long volleying roar of it, and a few large drops of rain fell. Mr. Cocker stood at the rail with a telescope in his hand. He busily watched the men up aloft, sometimes letting fly an order to the boatswain in a voice that went past the ear like a stone from a sling. A large drop of rain splashed upon Mr. Saunders's nose.

'It's about to burst, I think,' said he, looking straight up into the heavens with his modest yearning eyes. 'I shall go below ;' and down trotted the little creature.

'Mr. Cocker,' said I, 'lend me your glass for an instant, will you?' I pointed it at the brig. 'Yes,' I exclaimed, talking to the second mate with the telescope at my eye ; 'I believe I was not mistaken. Full of men, indeed! Phew! Why, there are hands enough upon her yards to furnish out the complement of a fifty-gun frigate.'

It was indeed as I said. They were furling all canvas upon the stranger, intending apparently to let her meet what was to come with a small storm foretrysail, which I could see a crowd of seamen bending and making ready for setting. Her fore and topsail yards were loaded with men swarming like bees along the thin delicate lines of spars, and even as I watched, the canvas they were rolling up melted away into slender streaks of white. In the crosstrees of both masts, and higher yet on the yards above, and in the tops also, were a number of men busily employed in sending down the royal, skysail, and topgallant yards and housing the topgallant masts. There looked to me to be at least a hundred of a crew to the vessel.

You found something almost ghastly and absolutely startling in the sharp distinctness of the little fabric rolling against the thunder-black skies behind her, and upon the long, malignant, greenish-hued swell in which the plunging lightning was sparkling as though the water were crackling with phosphoric fires. Dark as the atmosphere was with the deep shadow of storm, the brig stood out to the eye visible to the minutest detail the sight could reach to, plunging heavily under her naked spars, with her wet black sides darting out the mirrored flame of the lightning flashes with as clear a dazzle as glass or polished brass would throw.

'The number of her crew witnesses to her character,' said I, returning the telescope to Mr. Cocker.

'Oh, there is no doubt of her,' he exclaimed; 'the captain's an old hand, and twigged her speedily.'

'The weather will put an end to her, I expect,' said I. 'Very lucky for us, Mr. Cocker. A large crew of ruffians and six guns of a side, not to mention a twenty-four pounder in the bows, and cutlasses and small-arms in galore, hardly form a joke. It is easy to figure the beauty, that sails, I dare say, three feet to our one, quietly sheering alongside and throwing seventy or eighty of her children aboard, dark-skinned assassins, armed to the teeth, reeking of garlic. Well, hang me, Mr. Cocker, if I didn't believe that the times of those gentry had passed some years ago.'

His lips were moving to answer me, but there was a wide and blinding flash of lightning at that instant that set the heavens on fire, immediately followed by a crash of thunder as deafening as though a first-rate had blown up close aboard us. Yet again the scowl of the clouds deepened in darkness, and the brig grew vague on a sudden in the gloom of the storm.

'There comes the rain!' cried Mr. Cocker, pointing to a line of greyish shadow with a look of steam boiling up as it were from the base of it. It drew creeping slowly on to the brig, and its perpendicular fall made one think of it as of a vast sheet of water up above overflowing and cataracting sheer down over the edge of a cloud.

'There is no wind there,' said I; 'it is a regular Irishman's hurricane; right up and down. But here goes for a waterproof.'

I trundled below for a suit of rubber clothes, being too anxious to observe what was to happen to choose to leave the deck. All the passengers were congregated in the cuddy, and the lightning, as it glittered in the port-holes and skylights, flashed up their faces in the gloomy atmosphere, making them look a pale and trembling crowd. The colonel was pacing the deck near the piano. Miss Hudson leaned against her mother with her hands over her eyes. If ever there came a brighter flash than usual, one lady or another would scream. Colledge and Miss Temple sat over a draughtboard; but I could not gather, from the hurried glance I threw over the people as I passed through them, that they were playing. I equipped myself from head to foot in waterproofs and came again into the saloon on my way to the poop.

'Are you going on deck, Dugdale?' cried Mr. Johnson, shouting aloud, to render his voice audible above the continuous cannonading of the thunder.

'Yes,' I replied.

'You will be struck dead, sir,' called out Mrs. Hudson.

'I have half a mind to join you,' said Mr. Emmett, jumping up with a wild look at the skylight; 'it's simply beastly down here.'

'Hark to that!' bawled the colonel; 'there's a shower for you!'

The wall of rain had reached us. For a minute before it struck the ship you could hear it hissing upon the sea like twenty locomotives blowing off steam; then plump! came the cataract on

to our decks. Had every drop been a brick, the noise could not have been more astounding. One couldn't hear the thunder for the roaring of the fall of water and hailstones, though the deep and awful note of the electric storm was in it to add to its tremendous sound. The darkness was now so heavy in the cuddy, that in the intervals of the lightning the faces of the people were scarce distinguishable. Amid the distracting noises of the thunder, of the breathless storm of hail and rain, of the water cascading off the decks overboard in a furious gushing and seething, arose the chorus of a number of seamen on the quarter-deck hauling upon the main-top-sail halliards there, with the piercing chirruping of the boatswain's pipe and hoarse orders delivered overhead from the poop.

'Where's the steward?' bawled the colonel in his loudest tones. 'Confound it, are we to be left in total blackness here? Why don't some one light the lamps?'

'Are you coming on deck, Mr. Emmett?' I cried; but he had sunk back on his seat with his arms folded and his head bowed; and, obtaining no reply, I walked to the companion steps, receiving, as I passed Miss Temple, a half interrogative glance from her, which made me look again in readiness to answer the question that seemed to hover on her lips. But her eyes instantly dropped, and the next instant she had turned to say something to her aunt, who was on a sofa behind her; so, rounding on my heel, up I went into the smoking wet.

There was nothing to be seen but rain—such a sheet of it as one must explore the latitudes we were in to parallel. The lightning flashed amidst it incessantly, and every line of the falling water sparkled like glowing wire in dazzling hues of crimson and of violet alternating. I waited under the shelter of the companion cover till the first weight of all this rain and hail should have passed. Through the haze of moisture that rose like steam off the decks to the cataractal swamping, I could discern the figure of old Keeling, looking like a soaked scarecrow, the fine-weather hat upon his head reduced to pulp and hanging about his ears like a rotten fig. The fellow at the wheel stood like a statue amid the drenching down-pour; but the men who had been stationed at the guns were gone.

I had not been a minute in the hatchway when the heavens seemed to be split open to the very heart of their depths by a flash of lightning, followed in the space of the beat of a heart by a shock of thunder that seemed to happen immediately over our mastheads—a most soul-subduing crash, if ever there was one! and as if by magic the rain ceased, and the atmosphere sensibly brightened. There was a great noise of shrieking in the cuddy, and half blinded, and, pretty handsomely dazed by that terrible blast of lightning and the thunder-clap which had followed, I crept down the steps with my pulse beating hard in my ears to see what had happened, scarce knowing but that some one had been struck and perhaps killed.

'What is it?' I shouted to the colonel, who stood at the foot of the ladder.

'Only Mrs. Hudson in hysterics,' he roared; on hearing which I went up again, being in no temper to make one of the nervous company below.

The swell had flattened; all to starboard there was an oozing as of daylight into the breathless thickness, with ugly hump-shaped masses of black vapour defining themselves up in the ugly sallow smother in a sort of writhing way, as though they were coming together in a jumble; but to port it was as black as thunder, an inky slope hoary with rain, with lightning spitting and zigzagging all over it. I went to the rail, where stood Mr. Cocker with his clothes full of water.

'A pretty little shower!' said I.

'Very,' he answered, with his face showing of a bleached look like the flesh of a washerwoman's hand. 'A plague on this sort of work, say I! This serge shrinks consumedly when drenched, and my trousers will be up to my knees to-morrow morning—three pounds ten as good as washed out of a man's pocket.'

'Where's your glass, Mr. Cocker?'

'In that hencoop there,' said he.

I pulled out and directed it at the dim blotch of brig that had caught my eye stealing out of the wet dusk like the phantom of a ship.

'By my great-grandfather's wig!' cried I with a start. 'So! no fear *now* of being boarded. Our windpipes are safe for the present. Look for yourself, Mr. Cocker.'

He ogled her an instant, then bawled to the skipper, who was speaking to Mr. Prance.

'The brig's been struck, sir! Her mainmast is over the side.'

In very truth it was as he declared. I whipped the glass out of his hand for another look, and, sure enough, could clearly distinguish a whole lumber of wreckage lifting to the roll of the subdued swell alongside the swaying hull of the brig. Her foremast and topmast stood intact to the cross-trees, but abaft she was as completely denuded as if a chopper had been laid to the foot of the mast. The mess is not to be described. I could make out that a length of her bulwark was crushed flat, and the black lines of shrouds and gear went snaking overboard like so many serpents wriggling out of the hatches into the water. But the gloom was too deep to suffer me to see what her people were doing.

I went to the companion-way and called down to Colonel Bannister.

'Halloa? What now? Who wants *me*?' he shouted.

'Tell the ladies, colonel,' I sung down, 'that the brig has been struck by lightning, and that our safety, so far as *she* is concerned, is assured.'

I heard him roar out the news as I went to the side again, and a moment after up rushed the whole body of passengers to see for themselves. The decks were full of water, but nobody seemed to mind that. The ladies came splashing through it to the rail, some

of them taking terrified peeps at the mass of winking blackness settling away down in the east, and dodging the play of lightning, as it were, with a sort of involuntary ducking of their heads and lifting of their fingers to their eyes.

Old Keeling cried out: 'Ladies, be good enough to take my advice and return to the cabin. We shall be having a strong blow of wind coming along in a few minutes.'

'Gott, she iss on fire!' here shouted Hemskirk, pointing directly at the brig with a fat forefinger, whilst with the other hand he kept a binocular glass glued to his eyes.

'Is it so then, sir!' cried Mr. Prance to the skipper; 'there is smoke rising from her fore-hatch.'

Mr. Cocker had replaced his telescope in the hencoop; I jumped for it, and in a trice had the lenses bearing upon the brig. There was an appearance of smoke, a thin bluish haze of it, as though mounting from a newly kindled bonfire, slowly going spirally into the motionless air; but almost at the instant of my first looking I thought I could witness something of a ruddy tinge flashing for a breath into this smoke, as if to a sudden leap of flame. Though the brig lay at the same distance that had separated her from us throughout the afternoon, the shrouded and heaped-up vaporous wall of firmament beyond her seemed to heave her as close again to us as she really was; and now quite easily by the aid of the glass I could see her decks as she rolled them our way dark with her people, many of them hacking and hewing at her rigging, as though to clear away the wreckage; others seemingly passing buckets along; others, again, running wildly and as it might seem aimlessly about, whilst with the regularity of a swing in action the beautifully moulded hull rolled quietly from side to side with a rhythmic oscillation of her one mast upon which the fragment of white trysail filled and hollowed as it beat the air, starting out upon the eye with a very ghastliness of pallor as it swelled to its cotton-like hue out of the shadow of its incurving, and hovered like some butterfly over the hideous dusky green of the swell.

I replaced the telescope.

'Here comes the wind!' I heard Mr. Cocker sing out.

'Ladies,' cried old Keeling, 'let me beg of you to step below.'

Most of them complied, but a few lingered, staring with curiosity at the coming weather. I watched it with amazement, for never before had I seen a storm of wind coming down upon a ship in a sort of wall. One saw the line of it in a ridge of foam whose extremities were lost in the gloom on either hand. It was of a glass-like smoothness all in front of it, and not a breath of air was to be felt when the stormy hissing of it was loud in our ears as it came sweeping up, the clouds on high darting to right and left, and a paler faintness, as of increasing daylight, coming into the air along with it. The bull-like notes of Mr Prance rang from the poop through the slip.

'Stand by main-topsail halliards—fore-topsail sheets—foretop-mast staysail down-haul.'

The wind struck the brig. My eye was upon her, and she disappeared in the shrieking whirl of flying spume as you extinguish a reflection in a mirror by breathing upon the glass. A minute later it was upon us. It smote the Indiaman right abeam, and down she lay in a seething and hissing flatness of boiling waters, stooping yet and yet, till the line of the topgallant bulwark rail looked to be flush with the furious yeasty smother. There were two men at the helm holding the wheel jammed hard over. I swung to a belaying pin on the weather rail, and the poop deck went down from me to leeward at an angle that made one's eyes reel in the head to look along it. There was a true hurricane note in the bellowing of the wind on high under the rush and disparting of the maddened clouds, and the first flash of it between our masts was as the passage of a score of locomotives racing by at express speed and shrieking as they went.

I was waiting to see what the ship meant to do, when the weather main-topsail sheet parted, though a treble-reefed sail, with a sound like another clap of thunder, and in a moment the canvas was flogging away from the yard in ribands, with Mr. Cocker shouting at the top of his voice, and a crowd of seamen tumbling and capsizing about the main deck to the officer's orders to haul upon the clewlines. It was at that instant, amidst all this prodigious hallabaloo, that I caught sight of Miss Temple to leeward of the mizzen mast holding on to some gear that was belayed at the foot of the mast. As my gaze rested on her the rope she grasped either overhauled itself or was detached from the pin, and she swung out to leeward. There were hencoops and rails and the mizzen shrouds to save her from going overboard; but there was nothing to prevent her from breaking a limb, or even her neck, if she let go. Though my legs yet preserved something of their old seafaring nimbleness, the slope of the deck made desperate work for them. Yet the girl must be reached, and at once. She did not appear to have sense enough to lower herself down the rope till her feet touched, in which posture she might have hung with safety. She maintained her first clutch of the gear, and swung above the deck to the height of some two, perhaps three feet. Keeling, who was clinging to the weather vang, did not seem to see her. The helmsmen grinding at the wheel heeded nothing but their business. Mr. Prance and the second officer, clawing at the brass rail at the break of the poop, leaned to windward, with their eyes on the streaming rags of the maintopsail, shouting commands.

There was only one means of arriving at the girl with any approach to swiftness. I dropped on to the deck, and went down upon my knees with my head to windward, and worked my way stern first in that attitude to the line of lee hencoops, along which I made shift to travel, half jammed by my own weight against the bars of the coops, until, coming abreast of the girl, I got upon my

legs, and firmly planting my left foot against the bottom of the row of boxes in which the fowls were immured, and leaning on my right leg in a fencing posture, I put my arms round her waist and told her to let go. She did so at once, as likely as not because she could hold on no longer. The weight of her noble figure was rather more than I had bargained for. I had thought to hold her fairly off the deck and ease her away, whilst in my arms, down to the hencoop behind, on which she could sit; but she was too much for me. I was forced to let her feet touch the planks, where, losing her balance, she threw her arms round my neck to save herself from falling. The next moment I was lodged upon the hencoop, she on my knee, and her arms still enclosing my head; but this was only for a breath or two. It was easy to lift her to my side, and there she sat, her fine face dark with blushes, and her eyes sparkling with alarm and confusion and twenty other passions and emotions, whilst the curve of her bosom rose and fell with hysteric swiftness.

'What a very ridiculous position! It serves me right. I should have taken the captain's advice. I should have gone below.'

This was all my haughty companion condescended to say. Not a syllable of thanks—not a glance of softness to reward me! However, to be reasonable, she could have scarcely been audible had she attempted more words. Even to catch the few sentences she uttered I had to strain my ear to the movement of her lips, off which the wind clipped her speech with a silencing yell.

There had been but little in the thunder of the storm, which still showed livid over the eastern horizon, that surpassed the wild and prodigious roaring of this first outfly of the hurricane. The ship continued to lie down to the fierce sweep of the wind at the angle she had reached to—it was as good or bad, indeed, as being on her beam ends—and Miss Temple and I were forced to keep our seats upon the hencoop, no more able to crawl up the deck to where the companion hatch was than had it been a slope of polished ice. This maybe was what she meant by 'the ridiculousness of her position.' The captain, standing to windward, was sending ominous looks at the band of the foretopsail and at the foretop-maststaysail, the cloths of which continued miraculously to hold. There was too much wind for the sea to rise suddenly; indeed, the weight of the blast had smoothed down what remains of swell the rain and hail had left; the ocean was a level surface of foam, out of which the tempest of wind was tearing up whole snowstorms of flakes of spume, which flew over the ship in clouds that whitened out into a sort of dazzle, as though sun-touched, as they flew in their throbbing masses athwart the leaden sky which poured across the sea over the ship's bows in rags and trailing lengths and gyrating coils of sooty vapour.

'Look!' I shouted to Miss Temple, and pointed over our stern, where, out of the flying faintness and thickness of spray, the figure of the brig was at that instant forming itself.

I sprang upon the hencoop, the better to see, grasping the mizzen shrouds for support.

'Shall I give you a hoist?' I cried to the girl.

Her curiosity was too strong; the flying brig—a fleeting vision of the object which had filled us with alarm and suspense throughout the day—was a wonder to be witnessed at such a time as that at any cost. Her lips parted in the word yes to the howl of the gale, and in a moment I had her up alongside of me, my arm through hers, securely gripping and supporting her, and the pair of us gazing breathlessly at the sight astern.

With her single mast rising to the topmast cross-trees, the yards square, the remains of the trysail streaming like white hair from gaff and boltrope, the brig swept under our stern, shooting sheer athwart, seething smoothly as a sleigh over a level plain of snow, and rushing before the wind straight as the flight of an arrow. A coil of thick black smoke, whose base was reddened by sudden tongues of fire, blew over her bow, and coloured the atmosphere into which she rushed with a complexion of thunder. It seemed to rise from the forehatch, and it fled straight off the deck. I caught a sight of crowds of men forward and aft, with a couple of fellows leaping into the fore-rigging as the brig rushed by, to gesticulate to us. But the vision came and went in a few breaths like an object seen by lightning. So dense was the gale with spray, that there was scarcely a cable's length of opening round about us. The brig showed and was gone! a phantasm, with the white waters pouring over her sprit-sail yard as she rushed through it, and no more of her was to be noted by the eye during the headlong swiftness of her plunge from one wall of spindrift into another than the delicate lines of her rigging supporting the foremast, the bowsprit vanishing in a cloud of smoke, blowing ahead of her, a length of white deck, a flash of skylight glass, the glimmer, so to speak, of some score of faces turned our way.

'She is on fire,' I cried in Miss Temple's ear: 'she carries a doomed crew into that thickness!'

She moved, as if to resume her seat, and very carefully I got her on to the hencoop again.

But the first terrific spite of the gale was now gone, and the squab form of the Indiaman, lifting a little out of the seething cauldron in which she lay with her main-deck rail flush with the yeasty surface, was beginning slowly to pay off. Her decks gradually grew level, and presently she was right before the wind, with the howl of it at her taffrail, and her huge bows heaping up the white sea till the leaps of the summits were at either cathead.

Mr. Colledge's face showed in the companion-way.

'Oh, there you are, Miss Temple!' he roared. 'Mrs. Radcliffe is firmly persuaded you have been blown overboard.'

She rose, but sat again, for the wind was too strong for her. Friend Colledge himself seemed pinned by the weight of it in the hatch.

'We may be able to manage it between us,' I shouted; and, passing my arm through hers, I drove the pair of us to windward, and got her on to the companion-ladder, down which she went.

CHAPTER XIII

FIRE!

It blew fiercely all that night. A mountainous sea was rolling two hours after the first of the gale, amid which the *Countess Ida* lay hove-to under a small storm trysail, making very heavy weather of it indeed. There was a deal to talk about, but no opportunity for conversing. Few were present at the dinner-table, though the sea then running was moderate in comparison with the sickening heights to which it swelled later on; and there was little more to be done throughout the meal than to hold on for dear life, to keep a keen weather-eye lifting upon one's food, and to gaze speechlessly across the table at one another amid an uproar of howling hurricane, of roaring waters, of straining bulkheads, of a ceaseless clattering of crockery and other noisy articles, that rendered conversation sheerly impossible.

And you may add to all this a good deal of consternation amongst us passengers. I had seen some weather in my time, but never the like of such a tossing and plunging bout as this. There were moments, indeed, when one felt it high time to go to prayers: I mean when the ship would lie down on the slant of some prodigious surge until she was hanging by her keel off the slope with her broadside upon the water, as though it were the bottom of her. There were many heave-overs of this sort, every one of which was accompanied by half-stifled shrieks from the cabins, by the sounds of the crash of boxes, unlashed articles, chairs, movable commodities of all kinds rushing with lightning-speed to leeward. Heavy contributions had been made upon our nervous systems by the incidents of the day: the vicinity of the brig—the prospect of having our windpipes slit—the furious thunderstorm—the spectacle of the lightning-struck craft: and the stock of fortitude left amongst us was but slender for a manly and courageous encounter of such an experience as this night was to prove.

I vividly recall the appearance of the cuddy at eleven o'clock when the hurricane was nearing its height. The ship was hove-to on the starboard tack, and the lamps in the saloon would sometimes swing over to larboard till their globes appeared to rest against the upper deck. I had managed in some sort of parrot fashion to claw along the table to abreast of a swinging tray, where I mixed myself a glass of cold brandy grog, with which I slided down to a sofa on the lee-side; and there I sat looking up at the people to windward as at a row of figures in a gallery.

Heaven knows I was but little disposed to mirth; yet for the life of me I could not refrain from laughter at the miserable appearance presented by most of my fellow-passengers there assembled. Near to the cuddy front, on the windward seats, sat Mr. Johnson, with terror very visibly working in his white countenance. His eyes rolled frightfully to every unusually heavy stoop of the ship, and his long, lean frame writhed in a manner ludicrous to see, in his efforts to keep himself from darting forwards. Near him was Mr. Emmett, who strove to hold himself propped by thrusting at the cushions with his hands, and forking out his legs like a pair of open compasses with the toes stuck into the carpet on the deck, as though he was a ballet dancer about to attempt a pirouette on those extremities. Little Mr. Saunders, who had thoughtlessly taken a seat on the weather side, sat with his short shanks swinging high off the deck in the last agonies, as one could see, of holding on. My eye was on him when he slided off the cushion to one of those dizzy heaves of the ship which might have made any man believe she was capsizing. He shot off the smooth leather like a bolt discharged from a cross-bow, and, striking the deck, rolled over and over in the manner of a boy coming down a hill. There was nothing to arrest him; he passed under the table and arrived half-dead within a fathom of me; on which I edged along to his little figure and picked him up. He was not hurt, but was terribly frightened.

'What shocking weather, to be sure!' was all he said.

I put my glass of grog into the worthy little creature's hand, and he thanked me with one of his long-faced, wistful looks, then applied the tumbler to his mouth and emptied it.

But to end all this: at three o'clock in the morning there was a sensible decrease in the gale. I had fallen asleep in the cuddy, and, waking at that hour, and finding but one lamp dimly burning, and the interior deserted, I worked my way to the hatch, groped along to my cabin, and tumbled into my bunk, where I slept soundly till half-past eight. The sun was shining when I opened my eyes: the ship was plunging and rolling, but easily, and in a floating, launching manner, that proved her to be sailing along with the wind aft. Colledge was seated in his bunk with his legs over the edge, gazing at me meditatively.

'Awake?' he exclaimed.

'Yes,' said I.

'Fine weather this morning, Dugdale. But preserve us, what a night we've come through, hey? D'ye remember talking of the *fun* of a voyage? Yesterday was a humorous time certainly.'

I sprang out of bed. 'Patience, my friend, patience!' said I; 'this trip will end, like everything else in our world.'

'Ay, at the bottom of the sea, for all one is to know,' he grumbled. 'A rod of land before twenty thousand acres of shipboard, say I. By the way, you and Miss Temple looked very happy in each other's company when I peeped out of the hatch yesterday to see what had become of her, at her aunt's request.'

'You should have risen through the deck a little earlier,' said I. 'You would have found her hanging.'

'Hanging!' he cried.

'Oh, not by the neck,' said I.

'What did you do?'

'I rescued her. I seized her by the waist and bore her gloriously to a hencoop.'

'Did you put your arms round her waist?' said he, staring at me.

'I did,' I exclaimed.

He looked a little gloomy. Then, brightening in a fitful kind of way, he said: 'Well, I suppose you *had* to do it—a case of pure necessity, Dugdale?'

I closed one eye and smiled at him.

'She's a very fine woman,' said he, gazing at me gloomily again. 'I trust you have not been indiscreet enough to tell her that I am engaged to be married?'

'Oh now, my dear Colledge, *don't* let us trifle—*don't* let us trifle!' said I. 'Scarcely have you escaped the risk of being boarded by pirates—the chance of being beheaded by some giant picaroon—of being struck dead by lightning—of foundering in this ship in the small-hours—when round with circus speed sweep your thoughts to the ladies again, and your mouth is filled with impassioned questions. Where's your gratitude for these hair-breadth escapes?' and being by this time in trim for my morning bath, I bolted out of the cabin, laughing loudly, and deaf to his shout of, 'I say, though, *did* you tell her that I was engaged?'

The ocean was a very grand sight. The wind still blew fresh, but as the ship was running with it, it seemed to come without much weight. The sea was flowing in long tall surges of an amazing richness and brilliance of blue, and far and near their foaming heads flashed out to the sunshine in a splendour of whiteness that contrasted most gloriously with the long dark slopes of unbroken water. From sea-line to sea-line the sky was overspread with clouds of majestic bulk and grandeur of swelling form, as white in parts as the foam which broke under them, and with many rainbows in their skirts, and a tender violet shading in the centre of them, that gave them as they soared above the horizon the look of brushing the very heads of the coursing seas. The Indiaman was thundering through it under whole topsails and topgallant sails, rolling with the stateliness of a line-of-battle ship as she went, with a rhythmically recurring stoop of her ponderous bows till the water boiled to the line of her forecastle rail, and her deck forward looked to lie as flat as a spoon in the dazzling smother.

I saw Mr. Prance on the poop, and, having had my bath, stepped aft to exchange a greeting with him.

'The ship appears to have come safely out of last night's mess,' said I.

'It was a real breeze,' he answered; 'nothing suffered but the

main-topsail. The *Countess Ida's* a proper ship, Mr. Dugdale. Those who put her together made all allowances, even for her rats. There's some craft I know would have strained themselves into mere baskets in last night's popple. But there was not an inch more of water this morning in the *Countess's* well than will drain into her in twenty-four hours in a river.'

'And the brig, Mr. Prance? I believe I and Miss Temple were the two who saw the last of her.'

'No. Captain Keeling spied her as she swept under our stern,' said he. 'She was on fire; and by this time, I reckon her beautiful hull—and truly beautiful it was, Mr. Dugdale—will be represented somewhere around us here by a few charred fragments.'

'Or,' said I, 'even supposing they managed to extinguish the fire, Mr. Prance, her one mast with most of its heavy hamper aloft was not going to stand the hurricane very long. So she'll either be a few blackened staves, as you say, or a sheer hulk. And her people?'

'Ah,' exclaimed the chief mate, fetching a deep breath, 'from eighty to a hundred of them I allow. There's no boat put together by mortal hands could have lived last night. By heavens, though, but it is enough to make a harlequin thoughtful to figure such a shipload of souls as that brig carried hurried into mere carcases for the deep-sea dab to smell to and the wall-eyed cod of the Atlantic to nibble at.'

'Now, honestly, Mr. Prance—do you really believe there was anything of the pirate about that brig?'

'Honestly, Mr. Dugdale, I do, sir; and I haven't a shadow of a doubt that if the weather had taken any other turn, if a sailing breeze had sprung up, or the water had held smooth enough for a boating excursion, her people would have put us to our trumps with a good chance of their crippling us and plundering us, to say no more.'

Here the breakfast bell rang, and I rushed to the cabin to complete my toilet for the table.

There was no lack of talk this morning when the passengers had taken their places. The anxieties of the preceding day and night seemed only to have deepened the purple hue of old Keeling's countenance, and his face showed like the north-west moon in a mist betwixt the tall points of his shirt collars as he turned his skewered form from side to side answering questions, smirking to congratulations, and bowing to the 'Good-morning, captain,' showered upon him by the ladies. Mr. Johnson came to the table with a black eye, and Dr. Hemmeridge's forehead was neatly inlaid with an immense strip of his own sticking-plaster, the effect in both cases of the gentlemen having fallen out of their bunks in the night. Colonel Bannister had sprained a wrist, and the pain made him unusually vindictive and aggressive in his remarks. The weather had not apparently served the ladies very kindly. Mrs. Hudson presented herself with her wig slightly awry, and her daughter

looked as if she had not been to bed for a week. It was hard to realise, in fact, that the pale spiritless young lady with heavy violet eyes looking languidly through their long lashes, which deepened yet the dark shadow in the hollows under them, was the golden, flashful, laughing, coquettish young creature of the preceding morning.

I had made sure of a bow at least from Miss Temple; but I never once caught so much as a glance from her. Yet she was very easy and smiling in her occasional conversation with Colledge across the table. She alone of the women seemed to have suffered nothing from the violent usage of the night that was gone. In faultlessness of appearance, so far as her hair and attire and the like went, she might have stepped from her bedroom ashore after a couple of hours spent with her maid before a looking-glass. Not even a look for me! thought I; not even one of those cold swiftly fading smiles with which she would receive the greeting of a neighbour or a sentence from the captain!

I was stupid enough to feel piqued—to suffer from a fit of bad temper, in short, which came very near to landing me in an ugly quarrel with Mr. Johnson.

'D'ye know, I rather wish *now*,' said this journalist, addressing us generally at one end of the table, but with an air of caution, as though he did not desire the colonel to hear him, 'that that brig yesterday *had* attacked us. It would have furnished me with an opportunity for a very remarkable sea-description.'

'Tut!' said I, with a sneer; 'before a man can describe he must see; and what would *you* have seen?'

'Seen, sir?' he cried; 'why, everything that might have happened, sir.'

'Amongst the rats perhaps down in the hold. Nothing more to be seen *there*, unless it's bilge water.'

'Goot!' cried Mynheer Hemskirk. 'It vould hov been vonny to combare Meester Shonson's description mit der reeality.'

'I will ask you not to question my courage,' said Mr. Johnson, looking at me with a face whose paleness was not a little accentuated by his black eye. 'I believe when it came to the scratch I should be found as good as another. *You* would have fought, of course,' he added, with a sarcastic sneer at me.

'Yes; I would have fought then, just as I am ready to fight now,' said I, looking at him.

'Gentlemen, gentlemen,' exclaimed Mr. Prance, in a subdued reprimanding voice, 'the ladies will be hearing you in a minute.'

'You have been a sailor, Dugdale, you know,' remarked Mr. Emmett in a satirical tone, 'and might, therefore, have guessed yesterday that either the brig was a harmless trader, or that, supposing her to have been of a piratical nature, she would not attack us.'

'And what then?' cried I, eyeing him hotly.

'Well,' said he, with a foolish grin, 'of course, under those

circumstances, a large character for heroism might be earned very cheaply indeed.'

Johnson lay back in his chair to deliver himself of a noisy laugh. His seat was a fixed revolving contrivance, and its one socketed leg might have been injured during the night. Be this as it may, on the journalist flinging himself back with a loud applauding 'Ha! ha!' of his friend Emmett's satiric hit at me, the chair broke, and backward he went with it with a knife in one hand and a fork in the other. Old Keeling started to his feet; the stewards came in a rush to the prostrate man. Those ladies who were near gathered their gowns about them as they watched him plunging in his efforts to extricate himself from the chair, in which his hips were in some manner jammed. For my part, having breakfasted, and being half suffocated with laughter, I was glad enough to run away out on deck. Indeed, the disaster had cooled my temper, and this occurrence was something to be thankful for, since one thing was leading to another, and, for all one could tell, the journalist and I might have come to blows as we sat side by side.

He and Emmett cut me for the rest of the day. My own temper was sulky for the most part. I spent the whole of the morning on the forecastle, smoking pipe after pipe in the 'eyes' of the ship, yarning in a fragmentary way with the boatswain, who invented excuses to come into the 'head' to indulge in a brief chat with me, whilst by his postures and motions he contrived to wear an air of business to the gaze that might be watching from the poop.

I would not own to myself that the sullen cast of my temper that day was due to Miss Temple; but secretly I was quite conscious that my mood was owing to her, and the mere preception of this was a new vexation to me. For what was this young lady to me? What could signify her coolness, her insolence, her cold and cutting disregard of me? We had barely exchanged a dozen words since we left the Thames. Though my admiration of her fine figure, her haughty face, her dark, tragic, passionate eyes was extravagantly great, it was hidden; she had not divined it; and she was therefore without the influence over my moods and emotions which she might have possessed had I known that she was conscious how deeply she fascinated me. She would not even give me a chance to thoroughly dislike her. The heart cannot steer a middle course with such a woman as she. Had her behaviour enabled me to hate her, I should have felt easy; but her conduct was of the marble-like quality of her features, hard and polished, and too slippery for the passions to set a footing upon. 'Pshaw!' thought I again and again, as I viciously hammered the ashes out of the bowl of my pipe on the forecastle rail, 'am not I an idiot to be thinking of yonder woman in this fashion, musing upon her, speculating about her—a person who is absolutely as much a stranger to me as any fine lady driving past me in a London park!' Yet would I repeatedly catch myself stealing peeps at her from under the arch of the courses, hidden as I was right forward in the ship's

bows, while she was pacing the length of the poop with Mr. Colledge, or standing awhile to hold a conversation with her aunt and Captain Keeling, the nobility of her figure and the chilling lofty dignity of her bearing distinctly visible to me all that way off, and strongly defining her amongst the rest of the people who wavered and straggled about the deck.

The wind lightened towards noon ; the fine sailing breeze failed us, and sank into a small air off the larboard beam ; the swell of the sea went down, but the colour of the brine was still the same rich sparkling blue of the early morning. I had never seen so deeply pure and beautiful a tint in the ocean in these parallels. It made one think of the Cape Horn latitudes, with the white sun wheeling low, and a gleam of ice in the distant sapphire south. The great masses of cream-soft rainbow-tinctured cloud melted out, and at two o'clock in the afternoon it was a true equinoctial day, and the Indiaman a hot tropic picture, awnings spread, the pitch softening betwixt the seams, a sort of bluish steamy haze lazily floating off the line of her bulwark rail, through which the dim sea-limit showed in a sultry sinuous horizon. The ship rippled through it, clothed to her trucks with cloths that shone with the silver whiteness of stars to the hot noontide effulgence. The ayahs lolled about the quarter-deck, and John Chinaman sat upon a carronade fretting the baby he held into squeals of laughter and temper by tossing it. The old sow grunted with a grave grubbing noise under the long-boat, and fore and aft every cock in the ship was swelling his throat with defiant fine-weather crowings.

It was somewhere about three bells that evening—half-past seven o'clock—that I was standing with Mr. Prance at the brass rail that protected the break of the poop, the pair of us leaning upon it, watching a grinning hairy fellow capering in a hornpipe a little abaft the stowed anchor on the forecastle. The one-eyed ape which we had rescued, and which by this time was grown a favourite amongst the seamen, sat low in the foreshrouds, watching the dancing sailor—an odd bit of colour for the picture of the fore-part of the ship, clothed as he was in a red jacket and a cap like an inverted flower-pot, the tassel of it drooping to his empty socket. It was a most perfect ocean evening, the west glowing gloriously with a scarlet sunset, the sea tenderly heaving, a soft warm breathing of air holding the lighter sails aloft quiet. All the passengers were on deck saving Miss Temple, who was playing the piano to herself in the cuddy. In the recess just under me were three or four smokers ; and the voice of Mr. Hodder waxing warm in some argument with Mynheer Peter Hemskirk, entered with unpleasant disturbing emphasis into the tender concert of sounds produced by the fiddlers forward, the occasional laughter of the seamen, the tinkling in the saloon, the voices of the ladies aft, the gentle rippling of water alongside, combining, and softened by distance and the vastness amid which the ship floated, into a sort of music.

I was in the midst of a pleasant yarn with Mr. Prance, whilst

we hung over the rail, half watching the jigging chap forward, and half listening to each other. He was recounting some of his early experiences at sea, with a hint in his manner of lapsing anon into a sentimental mood on his lighting upon the name of a girl whom he had been betrothed to.

All on a sudden the music forward ceased. The fiddler that was working away upon the booms jumped up and peered downwards in the posture of a man snuffling up some strange smell. The fellow who was dancing came to a halt and looked too, walking to the forecastle edge and inclining his ear towards the forehatch, as it seemed. He stared round to the crowd of his shipmates who had been watching him, and said something, and a body of them came to where he was and stood gazing. The weather clew of the main-sail being lifted, all that happened forward lay plain in sight to those who were aft.

'What is wrong there?' exclaimed Mr. Prance abruptly, breaking off from what he was saying, and sending one of his falcon looks at the forecastle. 'The pose of that fiddling chap might make one believe he was tasting cholera somewhere about.'

A boatswain's mate came down the forecastle ladder and went to the forehatch, where he paused. Then, with a glance aft, he came right along to the quarter-deck with hurried steps, and mounted the poop ladder, coming to a stand when his head was on a level with the upper deck.

'What is it?' cried Mr. Prance.

The fellow answered in a low voice, audible only to the chief officer and myself: 'There's a smell of fire forwards, sir, and a sound as of some one knocking inside of the hatch.'

'A smell of fire!' ejaculated the mate; and swiftly, though preserving his quiet bearing, he descended to the quarter-deck and walked forward.

I had long ago made myself free of all parts of the ship, and guessed, therefore, that my following in the wake of the mate would attract no attention nor give significance to a business which might prove a false alarm. By the time he had reached the hatch I was at his side. The boatswain and sailmaker came out of their cabins, a number of seamen quitted the forecastle to join us, and the rest gathered at the edge of the raised deck, looking down. The fore-hatch was a great square protected by a cover that was to be lifted in pieces. A tarpaulin was stretched over it with battening irons to keep it fixed, for this was a hatch there was seldom or never any occasion to enter at sea, the cargo in all probability coming flush to it.

I had scarcely stood a moment in the atmosphere of this hatch, when I became sensible of a faint smell as of burning, yet too subtle to be detected by a nostril that was not particularly keen. As I was sniffing to make sure, there came a hollow, dull noise of knocking, distinct, and unmistakably produced by some one immediately under the hatch striking at it with a heavy instrument. Mr

Prance hung in the wind for a second or two snuffling and hearkening with the countenance of one who discredits his senses.

'Why,' he exclaimed, 'there *is* somebody below, and—and——' Here he sniffed up hard with much too much energy, methought, to enable him to taste the faint fumes. 'Carpenter,' he exclaimed to the withered old Scotchman who made one of the crowd of onlookers, 'get this hatch stripped and the cover lifted—quickly, but *quietly*, if you please.'

He looked sternly round upon the men ; and then sent a hurried glance aft, where stood Captain Keeling in the spot we had just vacated, with Mrs. Radcliffe on his arm.

The battens were nimbly drawn, the tarpaulin thrown aside, and some seamen stooped to raise the hatch cover. A few seconds were expended in prising and manœuvring, in the midst of which the knocking was repeated with a note of violence in it, accompanied by a general start and a growl of wonder from all hands.

'Heave !' cried the carpenter, and up came the cover, followed by a small cloud of blue smoke, and immediately after by the figure of the hideous sailor Crabb, who sprang from off the top of a layer of white-wood cases with a loud curse and a horrible fit of coughing.

CHAPTER XIV

CRABB

The atmosphere was still red with the sunset, though the luminary was below the horizon, and there was plenty of light to see by. An extraordinary shout went up from amongst the men at the sight of Crabb as he leapt out of the hatch in the heart of the little cloud of smoke. Those who were on the side of the deck on to which he jumped recoiled with a positive roar of horror and fright, one or two of them capsizing and rolling over and over away from the hatch, as though they were in too great a hurry to escape to find time to get upon their legs.

I very well remember feeling the blood desert my cheek, whilst my heart seemed to come to a stand, and my breathing grow difficult at the apparition of the fellow. *Crabb!* Why, I had *seen* him lying dead in his bunk ! I had heard of him as lying stitched up in a hammock on this very fore-hatch ! I had beheld that same hammock flash overboard, and I had watched it lifting and frisking away astern ! Who, then, was yonder hideous creature that had jumped in hobgoblin fashion out of the hold ? Could he be the buried Crabb himself ?

There is no lack of things to frighten people withal in this world ; but I cannot conceive of any shock comparable to the instant consternation felt by a man who meets another of whose death he is profoundly assured, and whom he has been thinking of as

a corpse, dead and buried, for any number of days gone by. The general horror, the prodigious universal amazement which held the mate and me and others amongst us speechless and motionless, as though we had been blasted and withered up by some electric bolt from heaven, scarcely endured a minute; yet by that handful of seconds was the picture of this amazing incident framed. I see Crabb now as he let fall his arm from his face when his fit of choking coughing ceased; and I recall the blind wild look of his distorted eyes as he slowly turned his countenance round, as though the mild evening light was violently oppressive to his vision after the days of blackness passed in the hold. His repulsive countenance was dark with dirt and grime. I observed many scratches upon his arms, which were naked to the elbows, as though he were fresh from squeezing and boring through some ugly jagged intricacies of stowed commodities. His shirt hung in rags upon him; there were many rents in his loose trousers, and there was blood upon his exposed chest, from a wound seemingly made by the sharp head of a nail or some edge of iron-sheathed case.

'Seize that man, bo'sun,' suddenly roared Mr. Prance, leaping out of his benumbed condition of astonishment in a way to make one think of a bull sweeping out through a hedge: 'handcuff him, and shut him up in your berth for the present. Get the head-pump rigged —the hose passed along. Jump for buckets, and stand by to pass them down.'

The powerful hand of the boatswain closed like a vice upon Crabb's neck. I thought to see a struggle, but the ugly sailor seemed weak and dazed, and stepped passively to the boatswain's berth into which my friend shot him, following and closing the door, to conceal, I suppose, the operation of manacling the man from the eyes of the half-stupefied Jacks.

Half-stupefied, I say: but the orders of the mate were like the flourish of some magic wand over each man. There was a headlong rush, though with something of discipline in the hurry of it too, at the chief officer's command. Smoke was draining through the open hatch, floating up thinly and lazily, though it was a thing to make one hold one's breath, not knowing but that the next vomit might prove a thicker, darker coil, with a lightning-like reddening of the base of it to the flicker of some deep-down tongue of flame. Fire at sea! Ah, great God! Out of the mere thought of it will come the spirit of the fleetest runner into the laziest and most lifeless shanks.

The mate sprang on top of the cases stowed level with the lower edges of the hold with a cry for men to follow him. The interior was the fore-part of the 'tween decks, bulkheaded off some little distance before the mainmast, and filled with light, easily handled goods. The hatch conducting to the ship's hold lay closed immediately under these few tons of freight in a line with the yawning square into which Mr. Prance had sprung. Where was the fire? If in the lower hold, then heaven help us! I glanced aft, and saw

the captain hastily walking forward. The passengers had come together in a crowd, and were staring with pale faces from the head of the poop ladder. Old Keeling was perfectly cool. He asked no questions, made no fuss, simply came to the side of the hatch, saw Mr. Prance and a gang of men at work breaking out the cargo, and stood watching, never hindering the people's labour by a question. His keen seawardly eye took in everything in a breath. One needed but to watch his face to see *that*. The placidity of the fine old fellow was a magnificent influence. In an incredibly short space of time, the captain meanwhile never once opening his lips, the head-pump was rigged, the hose trailed along and pointed ready, a number of seamen were standing in files with buckets ranged along, all prepared for drawing water and passing it to the hatchway with the swiftest expedition. I cannot express the wonderful encouragement the heart found in this silence alone. The captain trusted his chief mate, saw that he exactly knew what to do, and stood by as a spectator, with just one look of approval at his quiet, resolute, deep-breathing ranks of seamen awaiting orders.

Once he turned his purple face, and, observing Mr. Johnson and Mr. Emmett and one or two others nervously edging their way forwards, he beckoned with a long forefinger to a boatswain's mate and said in a low voice : 'Drive those gentlemen aft on to the poop, and see that none of the passengers leaves it.' He glanced at me once, but said nothing, possibly because he had found me looking on when he arrived.

All as tranquilly as though the job was no more than the mere breaking out of a few boxes of passengers' luggage, the work of removing the cargo so as to get at the fire proceeded. The smoke continued to steal stealthily up. The contents of the cases I do not know, but they were light enough to be lifted easily. A number of them were got on deck. The mate and Mr. Cocker—who had arrived from his cabin shortly after the captain had come—headed the gang of workers, and rapidly disappeared in the lanes they opened.

'Here it is!' at last came a muffled shout.

Mr. Cocker coming out of a dark hole like a rat, with the perspiration streaming from him as though a bucket of oil had been capsized over his head, sang out for the hose to be overhauled and the pump to be worked.

'Have you discovered the fire, sir?' said the captain, calling down to him in such a collected voice as he would have used in requesting a passenger to take wine with him.

'Yes, sir. It is a small affair. The hose will suffice, I think, sir.'

An instant after, the clanking of the plied pump was to be heard along with the sound of water steadily gushing, followed by a cloud of steam, which quickly vanished. A quarter of an hour later the mate came up black as a chimney-sweep. He touched his cap to the captain, and simply said : 'The fire's out, sir.'

'What was it, Mr. Prance?'

'A bale of blankets, sir.'

'Can you guess how it originated?'

'I expect that the man Crabb——' began the mate.

The captain started and stared.

'The man Crabb,' continued Mr. Prance, 'whom we imagined dead and buried, sir, has been skulking in the hold'—old Keeling frowned with amazement—'and I have no doubt he fired the bale whilst lighting his pipe.'

'Crabb in the hold!' cried the skipper; 'do you speak of the man whom we buried, sir?'

'The same, sir,' answered Mr. Prance.

Old Keeling gazed about him with a gaping face. 'But he died, sir, and was buried,' he exclaimed. 'I read the funeral service over him, and saw, sir—Mr. Prance, I *saw* with my own eyes the hammock fall from the grating after it had been tilted.'

The chief officer said something in reply which I did not catch, owing to the noise amongst the men who were yet in the hold and the talk of the sailors round about. He then walked to the boatswain's berth followed by the captain, that old marline-spike's eyes might bear witness to the assurance that the Crabb who had leapt up out of the fore-hatch in a smother of smoke was the same Crabb who had been solemnly interred over the ship's side some weeks before.

Mr. Cocker came wriggling out of the hold and got on to the deck alongside of me to superintend the restowal of the broken-out goods.

'Is the fire out?' I asked.

'Black out,' he answered. 'It was no fire, to speak truly of it, Mr. Dugdale. A top bale of blankets or some such stuff was smouldering in about the circle of a five-shilling piece—a little ring eating slowly inwards, but throwing out smoke enough to furnish forth a volcano for a stage-scene. A beastly smell! not to speak of some of the stuff down there being as blackening as a shoe-polisher's brushes.' Here he looked at the palms of his hands, which were only a little more grimy than his face.—'But what's this I hear about Crabb? Has the dead sailor come to life again?'

'He's yonder,' said I, nodding towards the boatswain's berth, which the captain and mate had entered, closing the door after them: 'you'll need to see to believe. Time was that when a man was dropped over a ship's side with a cannon-ball at his feet he was as dead as if his brains were out. 'D'ye remember, Mr. Cocker, how that hammock went floating astern, as if there were less than a dead sailor in it, though something more than nothing? There's been some devilish stealthy scheme here, depend upon it. We may yet find out that the ship wasn't scuttled because the ugly rogue hadn't time to pierce through the lower hatch before he set the vessel on fire.'

'But he was a dead man, sir; Hemmeridge saw him dead,' cried Cocker, eyeing me with an inimitable air of astonishment.

'Ay,' said I, 'dead as the bones of a mummy. But he's *there* all the same,' I added, pointing to the forecastle cabin, 'as alive as you or I, and capable, I daresay, of kicking after a little.'

At this moment the mate put his head out of the boatswain's berth and called to Mr. Cocker, on which I walked leisurely aft, with amazement in me growing, and scarcely capable of realising the truth of what I had seen.

The passengers were still crowding the fore-part of the poop, peering and eagerly talking, but in subdued voices, with Colonel Bannister moving angrily amongst them, and the boatswain's mate sentinelling the foot of the ladder.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' cried Mrs. Radcliffe, leaning over the rail and crying down her question with a pecking motion of her head; 'is the fire out, do you know? Are we safe?'

'The fire *is* out, madam,' I replied, lifting my hat; 'and the ship is as safe this minute as ever she was in the Thames. Captain Keeling will, I have no doubt, be here very shortly to reassure you.'

Miss Temple, towering half a head above her aunt, looked down at me with an air of imperious questioning in her face. There was a hot scarlet blush all along the west, yet with power enough in its illumination to render each face of the crowd above quite distinguishable against the tender shadow stealing from the east into the air, and I could see an eagerness in the girl's full, dark, glowing, and steadfast gaze to warrant me the honour of a conversation with her if I chose to ascend the ladder. But just then Hemmeridge came out of the cuddy on to the quarter-deck with the hint of a stagger in his walk. His eyes showed that he was only just awake, and his hair that he had run out of his cabin in a hurry.

'I say, Dugdale,' he exclaimed, 'what's been the matter, hey? Fire, is it? And the steward tells me that Crabb has come back. Has the man gone mad?'

'There's been a fire,' said I, 'and Crabb has come back.'

Here Cocker came along the deck.

'Doctor, the captain wants you.'

'Where is he?'

'Come along; I'll take you to him,' said the second-mate, running his eye over Hemmeridge's figure with a half-look on at me full of meaning in it.

They walked forward, the doctor a trifle unsteady in his gait, I thought.

I went to my berth for some tobacco; I stayed a short time below, and when I returned, the last scar of sunset was gone. The west was a liquid violet darkness trembling with stars, and the ship was floating through the darkness of the night, which in these latitudes follows swiftly upon the heels of the departing day. Captain Keeling had come aft, and was standing in the midst of a

crowd of passengers answering questions, and soothing the women, who were snapping inquiries in whole volleys, their voices threaded by tremors and shrill with nerves. Mr. Prance, who had found time to cleanse himself, was on deck in charge of the ship. All was hushed forwards. Against the stars twinkling over the line of the forecastle rail under the foot of the foresail, that slowly lifted and fell to the heave of the ship, I could distinguish the outlines of sailors moving here and there in twos and threes. A subdued hoarse growling of voices came out of the block of darkness round about the galley and the longboat, where were gathered a number of men, doubtlessly discoursing on the marvellous incident of the evening. The glittering brilliants in the sky winked like dewdrops along the black edge of the spars and at the extremity of the yard-arms; and spite of the voices of the people aft and of the mutterings forward, so deep was the ocean hush up aloft that again and again the sound of the delicate night-breeze, breathing lightly into the visionary spaces of the sails, would fall like a sigh upon the ear.

'An exciting piece of work, Mr. Prance,' said I, stepping to his side, 'taking it from the start to the close.'

'Why, yes,' he answered. 'The passengers will not be wanting in experiences to relate when they get ashore. Enough has happened yesterday and to-day, in the way of excitement, I mean, to last out an ordinary voyage, though it were as long as one of Captain Cook's.'

'What has Hemmeridge to say about this business of Crabb, do you know?' I asked.

'You will keep the news to yourself, if you please,' he answered; 'but I don't mind telling *you* that he's under arrest—that is to say, he has to consider himself so.'

'What for?' I asked, greatly astonished.

'Why, Mr. Dugdale,' said he, slowly looking round, to make sure that the coast was clear, 'you may easily guess that this business of the scoundrel Crabb—an old pirate, as I remember telling you—signifies a very deep-laid plot, an atrociously ingenious conspiracy.'

'I supposed that at once,' said I.

'The fellow Crabb feigned to be dead,' he continued. 'A sham it must have been, otherwise he wouldn't be in irons yonder. Now, are we to believe that Hemmeridge can't distinguish between death and life? He reports the man dead to the captain. The fellow is stitched up; but, as we have since ascertained, a prepared hammock is substituted for the one that conceals his remains, and we bury maybe some clump of wood. This is the part Captain Keeling least likes, I think. He is a pious old gentleman, and his horror when——' He checked himself with a cough, and a sound on top of it like a smothered laugh, as though he enjoyed some fancy in his mind, but durst not be too candid, since it was the captain he talked about.

'It is assumed,' said I, 'that Hemmeridge represented Crabb as dead knowing him to be alive?' He nodded. 'What will have been the project?' I continued, shaping out the truth as, bit by bit, it formed itself in my head. 'Robbery, of course. Ay, Mr. Prance, that will have been it. Crabb is to be smuggled into the hold, the notion throughout the ship being that he is dead and overboard; and when in the hold——' I stopped.

'Well,' said he with a shrug of his shoulders, 'there's the mail-room. What else? With a parcel of diamonds in it worth seventy thousand pounds, not to speak of money, jewelry, and other precious matters.'

'By heavens! did any man ever hear the like of such a plot?' cried I; 'and Hemmeridge is suspected as a confederate?'

'We shall see, we shall see,' he answered.

'Just tell me this, Mr. Prance,' I exclaimed, thirsty with curiosity, 'who are the others involved? Somebody must have shifted Crabb's remains.'

'The sailmaker is in irons,' said he.

'Yes, I might have sworn it! Why is it that the high Roman nose of that chap has haunted my recollection of the ghastly appearance Mr. Crabb presented at every recurrence of my mind to the loathsome picture?'

He slightly started, and I could see him eyeing me earnestly.

'By the way,' he exclaimed, 'now that I think of it, Hemmeridge showed Crabb's body to *you*, didn't he?'

'Certainly he did,' I responded.

'Well, it will give the doctor a chance,' said he, as though thinking aloud; and so saying he made some steps in the direction of the captain, and I went down on the quarter-deck to blow a cloud and muse upon the matters he had filled my mind with.

CHAPTER XV

A SINGULAR PLOT

It speedily ran amongst us of the cuddy that the dead sailor who had been so very impressively interred by old Keeling had returned to the ship, and was alive in some part of her, secure in handcuffs or in leg-irons; but so much was made of the fire which had broken out that Crabb's reappearance lost as a miracle half the weight it would have carried had it happened alone. Besides, the sense of the people soon gathered that the business was a plot which had been managed with astonishing cleverness, and it all seemed plain as mud in a wine-glass when the whisper went round that Hemmeridge was under arrest an an arch-conspirator in the matter. And certainly it made one feel far from comfortable even to think that for the past weeks a ruffian of a true piratical complexion had

been secreted in the ship's hold, where his confederates would keep him supplied with tobacco and the means of lighting it, and where, in his borings and pryings, he was tolerably certain to have stumbled upon something inflammatory in the shape of spirits. Indeed, it made me draw my breath short when my mind went to the rum puncheons and the powder-magazine below, and to the vision of Crabb, drunk, stupidly groping with a naked light in his hand, during some midnight hour, maybe, when we were all in bed.

However, the imagination of the passengers would hardly go to these lengths. Their thoughts held to the fire, and their talk chiefly concerned it. When the skipper came below for a glass of grog that night, the ladies so baited him with questions that one pitied him almost for not being able to enjoy the privilege of venting his heated soul in a few strong words.

'I *cannot* satisfy myself, Captain Keeling, that the fire is utterly extinguished,' said Mrs. Bannister.

'Might it not burst out again, capting?' cried Mrs. Hudson. 'There should be plenty of pails kept filled with water ready to empty if smoke is smelt.'

'Perhaps something may be on fire even now!' exclaimed Mrs. Joliffe, 'something that doesn't make a smoke; and how *then* are the sailors to tell if all is right in the bottom of the ship?'

'Captain Keeling,' cried Mrs. Trevor, 'is it quite safe to go to bed, do you think?'

'If a fire should break out,' said Miss Hudson in a trembling voice, as though shudder after shudder were chasing through her, 'how can we depend upon being called? It is impossible to hear downstairs what is going on on deck.'

Poor old marline-spike made a bolt of it at last, fairly turning tail and rushing up the companion steps when it came to the colonel striking in and topping off the female broadsides by inquiries of a like nature delivered at the very height of his pipes.

However, the night passed quietly; and when next morning came and the people assembled at breakfast, all fear of fire was seemingly gone, and little more was talked about than Crabb and what his designs had been, the topic gathering no mean accentuation from the doctor's vacant place. Somewhere about ten o'clock I was standing at the taffrail watching the ship's wake, that was languidly streaming off in a short oily surface, and wondering whether, if we were to fall in with nothing brisker than these faint airs and draughts of wind, all hands would not have grown white-haired and decrepit by the time we were up with the Cape, leaving the Indian Ocean and Bombay out of consideration, when the head-steward came up to me.

'Captain Keeling's compliments, sir, and he'll feel greatly hobliged, providing you're not hotherwise occupied, by your stepping to his cabin, sir.'

'Oh yes, with pleasure,' said I. 'Is he alone?'

'He is not, sir'

I went down the companion steps, knocked at the captain's door, and entered. It was a roomy interior, a very noble ship's berth, occupying hard upon the width of the deck right aft, saving, as I have before described, a sort of small chart-room alongside, bulkheaded off. There was a large stern window, after the olden fashion, with the blue line of the horizon gently sliding up and down it, and a shivering light lifting off the sea to the glass, sharp and of a sort of azure brilliancy, as though from diamonds set a-trembling. Keeling, in full fig, his face showing of a dark red against some maple-coloured ground of bulkhead or ship's side, was seated at a table. He instantly rose on my entering, gave me one of his wire-drawn bows, and motioned me to a seat, thanking me in a few words for coming. On the starboard hand stood Crabb and the sailmaker, handcuffed, and on either side of them was a seaman with a cutlass dangling at his hip. On the port hand sat Dr. Hemmeridge, his legs crossed, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and his head drooped. He was deadly pale, and looked horribly ill and worried. Near him was one of the sailors, a young fellow of some seven or eight and twenty, with a quantity of hair falling over his brow, a straggling beard, and small black eyes, which roamed swiftly in glances charged methought with the spirit of mutiny and menace and defiance. Mr. Prance was at the captain's elbow; and the third mate was seated at an end of the table with a pen in his hand and some paper in front of him.

I bowed to Hemmeridge, but he took no notice. Until the captain addressed me, I stared hard at Crabb; for even now, with the ugly ruffian standing before me, my mind found it difficult to realise that he was alive; that the creature I gazed at was the man whom all hands of us, with an exception or two, supposed overboard a thousand fathoms deep. There was besides the fascination of his ugliness. The hunch-like curve of his back, his little blood-stained eyes looking away from his nose, as though they sought to peer at something at the back of his head, the greasy trail of carroty hair upon his back, the fragment of nose over his hare-lip, these and the rest of him combined into the representation of the most extravagantly grotesque, ill-favoured figure ever witnessed outside the bars of a menagerie. The sailmaker's face was as white as one of his bolts of canvas, but it wore a determined look, though I noticed a quivering in the nostrils of his high-perched nose, and a constant uneasy movement of the fingers, as of dying hands plucking at bedclothes.

'Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed old Keeling with the dignity and gravity of a judge, 'I've taken the liberty to send for you, as I am informed by Mr. Prance that when that man there'—inclining his head towards Crabb without looking at him—'was lying, as it was supposed, dead in his bunk, you accompanied Mr. Hemmeridge, the ship's surgeon'—here he indicated the doctor with a motion of his head but without looking at him either—'into the forecastle, and stood for some considerable time surveying the so-called corpse.'

'That is quite true,' said I.

'Did Mr. Hemmeridge expose the man's face to you?

'He did.'

'What impression was produced upon your mind by the sight of the—of the—body?'

Crabb gave a horrible grin.

'That he was stone-dead, Captain Keeling; so stone-dead, sir, that I can scarcely credit the man himself is now before me.'

Hemmeridge looked up and fixed his eyes upon me.

'It is but reasonable I should inform you, Mr. Dugdale,' continued old marline-spike, 'that Mr. Hemmeridge is under arrest on suspicion of conspiring with Crabb, with Willett, and with Thomas Bobbins'—he glanced at the man who stood next to the doctor—'to plunder the ship. Bobbins has given evidence that leaves me in no doubt as to the guilt of Crabb and Willett.'

Crabb uttered a curse through his teeth, accompanied with a look at the young seaman, in the one-eyed gleam of which murder methought was writ too large to be mistaken for any other intention. Old Keeling did not heed him.

'Bobbins's story,' he continued, 'is to this effect: that Crabb was to swallow a potion which would produce the appearance of death; that the sailmaker was to have a hammock weighted, shaped, and in all respects equipped to resemble the one in which Crabb would be stitched up: that in the dead of night, when the ship was silent, and the deck forward vacant, the sham hammock was to be placed upon the fore-hatch by the sailmaker and Bobbins, and the cover containing that man'—inclining his head at Crabb—'conveyed into the sailmaker's cabin, where it was to be cut open, the man freed, and secreted in the birth till consciousness had returned, and he was in a fit state to seize the first opportunity of sneaking into the hold. All this was done,' old Keeling went on, Mr. Prance meanwhile looking as grave as an owl over the skipper's shoulder, whilst every now and again a hideous grin would distort Crabb's frightful mouth, though the sailmaker continued to stare at the captain with a white and determined countenance, and Hemmeridge to listen with a frowning worried look, his leg that crossed the other swinging like a pendulum. 'The man Crabb got into the hold, was supplied with food and drink by Willett and Bobbins, and with tools to enable him to break into the mail-room——'

'And I'd ha' done it too,' here interrupted Crabb in a voice like a saw going through a balk of timber, 'if it hadn't been for the stinking smoke of them blasted blankets.'

'This inquiry,' continued Keeling, 'now entirely concerns Mr. Hemmeridge. You tell me, Mr. Dugdale, that Crabb seemed to you as a stone-dead man.'

'The devil himself couldn't ha' told the difference,' bawled Crabb. '*He's* not in it,' insolently motioning with his elbow towards the doctor. 'Wouldn't that blooming Bobbins ha' said so?' and he darted another murderous glance at the hairy young sailor.

'I can assure you, Captain Keeling,' said I, 'that the man was perfectly dead. There is not a shadow of a doubt in my mind that Mr. Hemmeridge was fully convinced the body was a corpse. Convinced, captain, but dissatisfied too; and perhaps,' said I, with a glance at Crabb, 'it is a pity for more sakes than one that he did not carry out his idea of a post-mortem examination.'

'Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Hemmeridge in a low, deep, trembling voice, 'before God and man, I am innocent; and I hope to live to call Captain Keeling to account for this monstrous slander, this enormous suspicion, this dishonourable and detestable accusation.'

'I've never heered,' said the man named Bobbins, in a long-drawn whining voice, 'that this gent was consarned. I remembered Crabb asking what was to be done if so be the surgeon should cut him up to see what he died of, and Mr. Willett kissed the Bible afore Crabb and me to this: that if the surgeon made up his mind to open Crabb, Willett was to show him the bottle of physic, and to tell him that Crabb had took it for some bad complaint, and that, though he might look dead, he worn't so.'

Crabb hove a fearful curse at the man. The bushy-whiskered sailor who guarded him on the right significantly put his hand upon the hilt of his cutlass whilst he said something to him under his breath.

'This is new to me,' exclaimed Keeling, screwing his eye gimlet-fashion into the face of Bobbins, and then letting it drop, as if satisfied. 'Mr. Hemmeridge, I have *suspected* you, sir; but it's a little soon for you to talk of my having *accused* you. You are a medical man. If anybody knows death by looking upon it you should. Yet, though this man Crabb is merely counterfeiting death, you come aft to me and report him dead! What am I to infer? Your ignorance or your guilt, sir?'

'Captain Keeling,' cried I, 'believe me when I promise you the man was not *counterfeiting* death. He was to all intents and purposes a corpse. How was this brought about? Surely by no exercise of his own art. The look of the eye—the droop of the jaw—the hue of the skin—Captain Keeling, it was death to the sight: no counterfeit—an effect produced by something much more powerful than the effort of such a will as that man has;' and I pointed with my thumb at Crabb, who told me with a curse to mind my own business.

'Mr. Dugdale, I thank you,' said Hemmeridge, bowing to me.

Captain Keeling held up a long thin phial about three-quarters full of a dark liquor. I had not before noticed it.

'This has been produced,' said he, 'by the man Bobbins, who states that it is the stuff which Crabb swallowed, and which caused the death-like aspect you saw in him.' He put the bottle down; then clenching his fist, smote the table violently. 'I cannot credit it!' he cried. 'I cannot be imposed on. Am I to believe that there is any drug in existence which will produce in a living being the exact semblance of death?'

'Oh, I think so, sir,' said Prance, speaking mildly.

Hemmeridge sneered.

'A semblance of death,' roared old Keeling, twisting round upon his chief mate, 'capable of deceiving the eye—the practised eye of a medical man? You may give me a dose of laudanum, and I may look dead to you, sir, but not to Mr. Hemmeridge yonder. No, sir; I am not to be persuaded,' and here he brought his fist down upon the table again. 'It is either gross ignorance or direct connivance, and I mean to be satisfied—I mean to sift it to the bottom—I mean to get at the truth, by——!'

His face was full of blood, and he puffed and blew like a swimmer struggling for his life.

'You've got the truth, and be so-and-so to you,' broke in Crabb.

The armed sailor ground his elbow into the fellow's ribs.

'I am merely here to answer your questions, Captain Keeling,' said I, 'and must apologise for taking a single step beyond the object you had in calling me to you; but at least permit me to ask, cannot Mr. Hemmeridge explain the nature of the drug contained in that bottle?'

'I do not know what it is,' exclaimed Hemmeridge.

'Suppose, sir,' said Mr. Prance, 'we give Crabb another dose; then you'll be able to judge for yourself.'

'You don't give me no more doses!' said Crabb. 'Try it on yourselves.'

The captain sat a little, looking at me vacantly, lost in thought. He suddenly turned to Hemmeridge.

'You are at liberty, sir; I remove the arrest.'

'And is that all?' exclaimed the other, after a brief pause, viewing him steadily. 'I must have an apology, sir; an apology ample, abundant, satisfying.'

'I will see you'—began old Keeling, then checked himself. 'You can leave this cabin, sir.'

Hemmeridge rose from his chair. 'I leave this cabin, sir,' said he, 'and I also leave my duties. Professionally, I do no more in this ship, sir. You have disgraced, you have dishonoured me. But,' said he, shaking his finger at him, 'you shall make me amends at Bombay, sir—you shall make me amends at Bombay!'

He stalked from the cabin, old Keeling watching him with a frown, but in silence.

'Captain,' I exclaimed, rising as the door closed behind the doctor, 'I am persuaded that Mr. Hemmeridge is innocent of all participation in this bad business. You have on board a gentleman who, I believe, has a very extensive knowledge of drugs and herbs and the like—I mean Mr. Saunders. It is just possible he might know the nature of the contents of that bottle.'

Keeling reflected a minute, and then said: 'Mr. Prance, send my compliments to Mr. Saunders, and ask him to my cabin.'

The mate went out; I was following him.

'Pray stay a little, Mr. Dugdale,' said the skipper.—'Men,

take those fellows forward. Remain where you are,' he added, turning to Bobbins.

A seaman flung open the door, and Crabb and the sailmaker passed out, followed by the second armed sailor, who silenced some blasphemous abuse that Crabb had paused to deliver, by giving him a shove that drove him headlong into the cuddy.

'I am sorry to detain you, Mr. Dugdale,' said the captain. 'Mr. Saunders is a rather nervous gentleman, and it might be agreeable to him to find you here.'

'You do not detain me, Captain Keeling. This is an amazing business, almost too wonderful in its way to believe in. Have you ascertained how Crabb became possessed of that magical drug?—and magical it must be, captain, for I give you my word that never showed any corpse deader than that fellow when Hemmeridge removed the canvas from his face.'

'I beg your honour's pardon,' exclaimed Bobbins, preserving his lamenting and whining voice, and knuckling his forehead as he spoke, whilst I could see old Keeling lifting his eyes to him with disgust and aversion strong in his purple countenance. 'Mr. Willett told me that Crabb 'ud say he'd got that there stuff off a travelling Jew that he fell in with at some Mediterranean port. He bought two lots of it, and tried a dose on a man who took it unbeknown, reckoning it good for spasms. He believed as it had killed the chap, sich was his corpse-like swound; but he come to all right arter four-and-twenty hours, and niver knowed nothen about it, and believed it still to be Monday when it were Toosday. This put the scheme he tried on here into his head.'

'Has he ever attempted anything of the same sort before?' inquired Keeling.

'I dunno, sir. He's a bad un. It 'ud make a marble heffigy sweat to hear him talk in his sleep.'

There was a knock at the cabin door, and Mr. Prance ushered in Mr. Saunders. The little chap looked very small as he entered, holding his large hat in his hand. He was pale, and stared up at us with something of alarm as we rose to his entrance, the skipper giving him the same hide-bound bow that he had grected me with.

'Is Mr. Saunders acquainted with the story of this business, Mr. Prance?' old Keeling inquired.

'Yes, sir,' replied the mate. 'I gave him the substance of it in a few words as we came along.'

'It is extremely startling,' said the little man, climbing on to the chair into which old Keeling had waved him, and dangling his short legs over the edge as a small boy might.

'Your knowledge of drugs and medicines, Mr. Saunders, is, I believe, very considerable?' said the skipper. The little fellow bowed. 'This,' said Keeling, holding up the phial, 'is a drug, the stupefying effects of which, I am informed, are so remarkable that anyone who takes it entirely loses animation, and pre-

sents such an aspect of death as will deceive the eye of the most expert medical practitioner. Is such a thing conceivable, Mr. Saunders?'

The little man reflected very earnestly for some moments, with his eyes fixed upon Keeling. He then asked Mr. Prance to hand him the phial, which he uncorked, and smelt and tasted.

'I cannot be positive,' he exclaimed, with a slow, wise shake of his large head; 'but I strongly suspect this to be what is known as *morion*, the death-wine of Pliny and Dioscorides. Mr. Dugdale, observe the strange, peculiar faint smell—what does it suggest?'

I put the bottle to my nose and sniffed. 'Opium will it be, Mr. Saunders?'

'Just so,' he cried. 'Captain Keeling, smell you, sir.'

The old skipper applied the bottle to his nostrils and snuffled a little. 'I should call this a kind of opium,' said he.

'If,' exclaimed Mr. Saunders, 'it be morion, as I believe it is, it is made from the mandragora or mandrake of the kind that flourishes in Greece and Palestine and in certain parts of the Mediterranean seaboard.'

'But am I to understand,' said Keeling, 'that a dose of it is going to make a man look as dead as if he were killed?'

'The effect of morion,' responded Mr. Saunders, 'is that of suspended animation, scarcely distinguishable from death.'

'Could it deceive a qualified man such as Dr. Hemmeridge?' demanded the skipper.

'I should think it very probable,' answered little Saunders cautiously; 'in fact, sir, as we have seen, he *was* deceived by the effects of that drug, be it morion or anything else.'

'You can go forward,' said the captain to Bobbins.

The fellow flourished a hand to his brow and left the cabin.

'Mr. Saunders, I am obliged to you, sir, for your information,' continued old Keeling. 'I trust to have your opinion confirmed either in Bombay or in London. To me it seems a very incredible thing. Mr. Dugdale, I thank you for the trouble you have given yourself to attend here.'

He bowed; and little Saunders and myself, accompanied by Mr. Prance, entered the cuddy.

'A most extraordinary business altogether,' cried the little man: 'it is wonderful enough, supposing the stuff to be morion, that a common sailor should be in possession of such a drug; but much more wonderful yet that it should occur to him to employ it as an instrument in probably the most audacious project ever adventured on board ship.'

'Hemmeridge might have opened Crabb,' said I.

'Well, the rogue foresaw it, and provided against it, as we know,' exclaimed Mr. Prance. 'There is pocketable booty in the mail-room to the value of hard upon a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. A man like Crabb will run risks for such plunder, Mr. Dugdale. If the sailmaker had kept his word and produced the

bottle to Hemmeridge, the doctor would have been pretty sure to stay his hand.'

'Why, likely as not,' I exclaimed; 'but tell me, Mr. Prance—that fellow Bobbins seems to have been coaxed very easily into peaching.'

'Ay,' said he; 'there'd been an ugly quarrel between him and Willett ten days ago. I believe the rascal would not have split whilst Crabb lay snug and secret in the hold, but on his showing himself, Bobbins took fright, thought of his neck, and being actuated besides by hatred of Willett, came forward and volunteered the whole yarn.'

'And how is he to be served?' inquired Mr. Saunders.

'Left to be at large, sir,' answered the mate; 'and punishment enough, too, as any one may suppose, of a false-hearted, lily-livered shipmate who has to swing his hammock three or four months among a forecastle full of hands. For my part,' added he with a laugh, 'if I were that miscreant, I'd rather be snug in irons along with Willett and the cast-eyed pirate, stowed safe out of sight.'

He entered his cabin, and Mr. Saunders and I stepped on to the quarter-deck.

CHAPTER XVI

WE SIGHT A WRECK

THE wonder and excitement raised in us by the extraordinary forecastle conspiracy to plunder the ship's mail-room passed away in two or three days. Monotony at sea is heavy and flattening. It passes over the soul as an iron roller over a lawn, and smooths down every asperity of memory into the merest flatness of moods and humours. Hemmeridge showed himself no more. I never again saw him whilst I was in the *Countess Ida*. He lay hid in his cabin, where he was fed, by the captain's orders, from the cuddy table; but he refused to leave his berth, swore he would not prescribe so much as a pill though a pestilence should fall upon the whole ship's company, and virtually left us all without the means of obtaining professional advice. His part in Crabb's and the sail-maker's scheme was vehemently discussed, as you will suppose. The colonel of course was without a shadow of a doubt of his guilt; but the rest of us, saving Mr. Johnson, who declined to give an opinion, considered him as wholly innocent.

Little Saunders gave himself a small air of importance as a person referred to by the captain on his knowledge of herbs, and strutted on the merits of his suspicion that the liquor was what he called morion. He took me into his cabin, and climbing into his bunk, produced a folio volume half the size of himself, with which

he dropped upon the deck, hugging the book to his heart as though it were his wife.

'Here,' said he, opening the volume and pointing at it and looking up into my face, 'is an account of the growth out of which morion is extracted. That,' continued he, still pointing with a little forefinger and a long white nail, 'is a picture of the plant in flower. This is an illustration of the young fruit. Here is the ovary, and here is the stamen. It is, in short, the well-known mandragora of Hippocrates. It consists of three or four species of stemless herbs, perennial,' said he, carrying his eyes to the book, 'and very hardy. Their roots are large and thick; and, as I told the captain,' cried he with a little movement of triumph, and pointing to the sentence eagerly, 'it is an inhabitant of the Mediterranean parallels.'

And then the little chap read out a long description of the flowers of the mandrake, of the corolla and lobes, of the berries and leaves, and I know not what else besides, in all of which my ignorant ear could find nothing of the smallest interest.

He afterwards went with his big book to the skipper, who, Mr. Prance told me, was impressed, though he was not to be persuaded.

'He will not believe,' said the chief officer, 'that there can be any aspect in a living body to deceive a medical man into a belief that the person is dead. I said to him: "How about the folks that are buried alive, sir?" He answered: "They are unhappy wretches, whom ignorant and gross persons, calling themselves medical men, lightly glance at and pronounce dead, and hurry away from. Hemmeridge would know better, sir. He *does* know better. I cannot satisfy myself that he could not distinguish life in that man Crabb. And what's the inference then? No matter, sir. I will have this thing gone closely into when we arrive at Bombay." Captain Keeling is an obstinate old sailor, Mr. Dugdale,' continued the mate. 'In truth, Hemmeridge is as innocent as you or I.'

Three days passed away. All this while the Indiaman was scarcely doing more than rippling through it. It was hard to realise that we were out in the mid-heart almost of one of old earth's mightiest oceans, so peaceful was the water, so still the heavens, so placid the dim sultry distances, where sky and sea were blended in a blue faintness, out of the north-west corner of which the light wind blew without power enough to swing the foot of the courses or to put a twinkle into the tall moon-coloured cloths of the topmast studding-sails.

It was a Monday morning, as very well indeed do I remember. I went on deck at about seven o'clock for a bath; and on looking over the forecastle rail, down away upon the starboard bow I caught sight of something sparkling that might very well have passed for the reflection in the water of a brilliant luminary. The old Scotch carpenter was leaning against the forecastle capstan smoking a pipe, his weather-hardened face of leather drooping over his folded arms.

'Pray, what is that object shining down there?' said I.

'Well, it puzzled me, sir,' he answered, slowly raising his head, and then leisurely staring in the direction of the appearance: 'It's naething mair nor less than a ship's hull, sir.'

By this time I was able to distinguish a bit clearer, and could trace, amid the delicate haze of silver glory that was hanging all over the sea that way, as it came in gushing and floating folds of magnificence from the sun that was already many degrees above the horizon, the outline of the hull of a small vessel, the proportions so faint as to be almost illusive. She was too far distant to exhibit much more than the mere flash she made, yet she was an object to constrain the attention in that wide blank shining calm of sea, and I lingered a little while looking at her, meanwhile yarning with the old carpenter about Crabb and the sailmaker and the incident of the fire, and such matters.

At breakfast there was some talk about this hull, and Mr. Emmett told the captain that he hoped a shot would be sent at her, as who was to know but that another cargo of monkeys might be exorcised out of the fabric.

'I should rather like to visit a wreck,' I heard Miss Temple say across the table to Mr. Colledge; 'I mean, of course, an abandoned vessel floating in the middle of the ocean.'

'I protest I would rather die than think of such a thing,' exclaimed her aunt.

'Well, I don't know,' said Colledge; 'it would be something to do and something to talk about. Did you ever board a wreck, Captain Keeling?'

'No, sir.'

'I would choose a wreck,' continued Miss Temple, in her clear, rich, somewhat trembling voice, but with an air that let you know she confined her speech to Mrs. Radcliffe and the young sprig opposite, and old marline-spike, as I love to call him, 'that had been abandoned for months, indeed for years, if such a thing could be: a hull covered with shells and weed and grass, into which the spirit of the enormous loneliness of the wide ocean had entered, so that you could get to think of her as a creation of the sea itself, as an uninhabited island is, or a noble seabird. Think,' she continued, fixing her large dark eyes upon Colledge with a light, almost sarcastic smile flickering about her lips, as though she was perfectly sensible that her thoughts and language were a trifle taller than that honourable young gentleman's intellectual stature rose to—'think of being utterly alone during a long, breathless, moonlit night on board such a wreck as I am imagining. The stillness! the imaginations which would come shaping out of the shadows! By putting one's ear to the hatchway, as you sailors call it, Captain Keeling, what should one be able to hear?'

'The noise of water washing about below, ma'am—I don't see what else,' answered the old skipper, stiffening up his figure, whilst

he adjusted his cravat, and gazing at her with a highly literal countenance over the points of his shirt collars.

She did not seem to hear him; her head had drooped, as though to a sudden engrossing thought, and her gaze rested upon something which her delicate fingers toyed with upon the table.

'What very odd fancies you have, Louise,' exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe with a peck of her face at the girl's handsome profile.

'Rather a good subject for a descriptive article, Johnson,' exclaimed Emmett aside with a drawl.

'Or for a picture,' answered Johnson; 'better on canvas than on paper, I think; don't you, Mr. Saunders? Calm sea—a moon up in the air—a wreck showing black against the white reflection under the planet—a haughty young lady'—here he softened his voice—'inclining her head to the fore-hatch with her hand to her ear.—A first-class idea, Emmett. Seize it, or it may occur to another man.'

Miss Temple was speaking again, but the rude imbecile jabber of the journalist prevented me from hearing her; and bestowing a sea-blessing on his head under my breath I left the table and went on deck.

There was every promise of a dead calm anon. The sea looked like ice in places with the bluish glint of the brine that softened the lines and curves betwixt the crawlings of the air into a tender contrast for the lustrous azure of the water where it was touched by the wind. It was a high, hot, cloudless morning, the topmost canvas, white as milk, looking dizzy up in the blue, as though it trembled in some sultry belt of atmosphere there. I went to the rail to view the wreck, and instantly made out on the other side of her the shining square of a sail—some ship on the rim of the horizon that had crawled into sight since six bells of the morning watch, and was now creeping down the smooth plain of sea with her yards braced somewhat forward, making a wind for herself out of what was scarce more than a catspaw to us, who had the thin fanning nearly over the stern.

Prance came up from the breakfast table with a telescope in his hand and stood by my side.

'That ship down yonder grows,' he exclaimed, pointing the glass and speaking with his eye at it; 'there'll be more air stirring down there than here; but little enough anywhere presently, though I tell you what, Mr. Dugdale, there's drop enough in the mercury to inspire one with hope.'

He brought the telescope to bear upon the hull, and was silent for a few moments, whilst I waited impatiently for him to make an end, wanting to look too.

'I don't think I can be mistaken,' said he presently in a musing voice: 'look you, Mr. Dugdale.'

'At what?' said I, as I took the glass from him.

'At the hull yonder.'

I put the telescope upon the rail and knelt to it. Points which

were invisible to the naked sight were clear enough now. The wreck was that of a vessel of some two hundred and fifty tons. She sat very light or high upon the water, and it was a part of the copper that rose to her bends which had emitted the flash that caught my eye on the forecastle. Her foremast was standing, and her foreyard lay crossed upon it. Her bowsprit also forked out, but the jib-booms were gone. Lengths of her bulwark were smashed level to the deck; but, gaunt as her mastless condition made her look, miserable as she showed in the mutilation of her sides, the beautiful shade of the hull stole out upon the sight through the deformities of her wrecked condition, as the fine shape of a woman expresses itself in defiance of the beggar's rags which may clothe her.

'By George! then, Mr. Prance—why, yes, to be sure! I see what you mean,' I cried all on a sudden—'that must be our buccaneering friend of the other day!'

'Neither more nor less,' said he; 'an odd rencontre certainly, considering what a big place the sea is. And yet I don't know: such a clipper will have sailed two feet to our one, though she exposed no more than her foresail. She'll have run as we did, and the light airs and baffling weather which followed will easily account for this meeting.'

'She is not yet the handful of charred staves you thought her, Mr. Prance,' said I; 'they managed to get the fire under anyway, though they had to abandon the brig in the end. What is that fellow beyond her? She has the look of a man-of-war: a ship, I believe: yes, I think I can catch sight of the yards on the mizzen peeping past the sails on the main.'

All her canvas had risen, but nothing of her hull, saving the black film of her bulwark hovering upon the horizon with an icy gleam betwixt it and the sea-line, as though there was no more of her than that. When the others came on deck there was no little excitement amongst them on learning that the hull was neither more nor less than the veritable wreck of the brig whose presence had filled us with alarm and misery a few days before. Glasses of all sorts were brought to bear upon her, and by this time it was to be ascertained without doubt that she was absolutely deserted; 'unless,' I heard Mr. Emmett say to Mr. Prance, 'her people should be lying concealed within, hoping to coax us to visit her by an appearance of being deserted, when, of course, they would cut us off, and plunder our remains—I mean those who would be fools enough to board her out of curiosity.'

'Likely as not,' Mr. Prance answered with a sour smile. 'I would advise you not to attempt to inspect her.'

'Not I,' answered the painter; and the chief officer turned abruptly from him to smother a laugh.

It was not long, however, before the delicate miracle of distant canvas shining past the hull upon the calm blue, like some spire of alabaster, was recognised as a man-of-war, not alone by the cut of

her canvas and by other peculiarities aloft readily determinable by the seafaring eye, but by the chequered band upon her hull, that had mounted fair to the firm crystal-like rim of the ocean, and by the line of white hammock-cloths that crowned her tall defences. She was some small corvette or ship-sloop, with her nationality to be sworn to even all that way off.

'An Englishman, do you think, Captain Keeling?' asked Colonel Bannister.

'Oh, God bless my heart, yes, sir,' answered the skipper.

'Now, *how* do you know, capting?' cried Mrs. Hudson.

'By my instincts as a Briton, ma'am,' he answered; 'patriotism so enlarges the nostril that a man can taste with his nose whenever anything of his country's about in the air.'

'To think of it now!' exclaimed Mrs. Hudson. 'I'm sorry the robbers have left that wreck. I should like the pirates to have been caught by the man-of-war and hung up.'

The hour of noon had been 'made,' as it is called at sea, and it was then a dead calm, with the clear chimes of eight bells ringing through a wonderful stillness on high, so faint was the undulation in the water, so soft the stir in the canvas to the gentle swaying of the tall spars. The wreck of the brig lay about two miles distant off the starboard beam, and by this hour the corvette, as she now proved to be, with the crimson cross fluttering at her peak, had floated to within a mile and a half or thereabouts on the other side of the hull; and thus the three of us lay. The corvette slewing her length out to us to the twist of some subtle current upon the still surface, showed a very handsome stately figure of a ship, at that distance at least. Her sails had the fairy-like delicacy of silver tint you observe in the moon when she hangs in an afternoon sky; they fitted the yardarms to perfection, and I stood admiring for a long quarter of an hour at a time the graceful lines of the bolt-ropes faintly curving to the yardarm sheave-holes, each clew looking a little way past the corner of the sail beneath it. A gilt figure-head of some royal device flashed at her bows and shed a ruddy gleam upon the water under it. There was the glistering of gilt about her quarter-galleries, and the sparkle of glass there. But Mr. Prance said that he would swear she was an old ship, her timbers as soft as cheese, and her chain pumps nearly worn out with plying, for all that she looked in the perspective of that azure atmosphere as airy a beauty as ever gave the milk-white bosoms of her canvas to the wind.

I went down on the quarter-deck to smoke a pipe, and whilst I lay over the bulwark rail watching the man-of-war, my eye was taken by a somewhat curious appearance in the line of the ocean away down in the south-west quarter. It was a sensible depression in the edge of the sea, as though you viewed it through defective window-glass. It was an atmospheric effect, and an odd one. The circle went round with the clearness of the side of a lens, save to that part, and there it looked as though some gigantic knife had

pared a piece clean out—with this addition: that there was a curious sort of faintness as of mist where the sky joined the sea in the hollow of this queer dip. I ran my eye over the poop to see if others up there were noting this appearance, but I did not observe that it had won attention. For my part, I should have made nothing of it, accepting it as some trick of refraction, but for it somehow entering into my head to remember how the second mate of the ship I had made my first voyage in once told me of a sudden shift of weather that had taken his craft aback and wrecked her to her tops, and that it had been heralded, though there was no man to interpret the sign, by just such another horizontal depression as that upon which my eyes were now resting.

However, on dismounting from the bulwarks for a brief yarn with little Saunders, the matter went out of my mind and I thought no more of it.

Whilst we were at lunch, Mr. Cocker came down the companion steps, cap in hand, and said something to the captain.

'All right, sir,' I heard old Keeling answer; 'it will be a visit of curiosity rather than of courtesy. How far is the boat?'

'She's only just left the wreck, sir.'

'Very well, Mr. Cocker.'

The second mate remounted the steps.

'The corvette,' exclaimed old Keeling, addressing us generally, 'has sent a boat to the wreck, presumably to overhaul and report upon her. The boat is now approaching us. I have little doubt that the corvette is homeward bound, in which case, ladies and gentlemen, you might be glad to send letters by her. There will be plenty of time. The calm I fear threatens to last.'

There was instantly a hurry amongst the passengers, most of whom rushed away from the table to write their letters.

I emptied my wine-glass and went on deck, and saw a man-of-war's boat approaching us; the bright ash oars rose and fell with exquisite precision, and the white water spat from the stem of the little craft as she was swept through it by the rowers, with a young fellow in the uniform of a naval lieutenant of that day steering her. She came flashing alongside; up rose the oars, the lively hearty in the bows hooked on, and the officer, lightly springing on to the rope ladder which had been dropped over the side for his convenience, gained the deck with a twist of his thumb that was meant as a salutation to the ship.

Old Keeling was now on the poop, and Mr. Cocker conducted the lieutenant to him. I happened to be standing near, talking with Colledge and Mrs. Radcliffe, Miss Temple not yet having returned with the letter which she had gone to her cabin to write. The skipper received the naval officer with a gracious bow.

'Our captain,' exclaimed the young fellow, in a gentlemanly easy way, 'instructed me to overhaul yonder wreck, and then come on to you to see if we can be of any service;' and I saw his eye rest with an expression of delight upon Miss Hudson, who rose

through the companion at that instant and drew close to hear what passed.

'Sir,' cried old Keeling, with another bow, 'I am obliged to your captain, sir. It is, sir, very considerate of him to send. My passengers are preparing letters, and we shall be very sensible of your goodness in receiving and transmitting them.'

'Pray, what ship is this, sir?' exclaimed the lieutenant, glancing about him with the curiosity of a stranger, and then taking another thirsty peep at the golden young lady.

'The *Countess Ida*, sir, of and from London for Bombay, so many days out. And pray what ship is that?'

'His Majesty's ship *Magicienne*.'

Colledge started. 'Beg pardon,' he exclaimed. 'Isn't Sir Edward Panton her commander?'

'He is,' answered the lieutenant.

'By George, my cousin!' cried Colledge; 'haven't seen him these seven years. How doocid odd, now, to fall in with him *here*!'

'Oh, indeed,' said the lieutenant, with a hint of respect in his manner that might have been wanting in it before. 'May I venture to ask your name?'

'Colledge.'

'Ah! of course; a son of my Lord Sandown. This will be news for Sir Edward.' He sent a look at the corvette, as though measuring the distance between the two vessels.

'Sir,' here said old Keeling, 'I believe that luncheon is still upon the table. Let me conduct you below, sir. It will have been a mighty hot ride for you out upon those unsheltered waters.'

The lieutenant bowed, and followed the skipper to the companion. Colledge put his arm through mine, and led me to the rail.

'I say, Dugdale,' he exclaimed, 'I should like to see my cousin. It would be rather a lark to visit his ship, wouldn't it? Not too far off, is she, d'ye think?' he added, cocking his eye at the vessel.

'Why, no; not on such a day as this.'

'Will you come if I go?'

'With the greatest pleasure.'

'Oh, that's downright jolly of you, by George. We'll go in my cousin's boat, and he'll send us back. I like the look of those men-of-war's men. It makes one feel safe even to see them rowing. Ah, there goes something to drink for the poor fellows. Upon my word, old Keeling buttons up a kind heart under that queer coat of his.'

'I presume,' said I, 'that the lieutanant will make no difficulty in consenting to carry us in his boat. I am ignorant of the rules which govern his service. Suppose you step below, and arrange with him? If he may not take us, Keeling will lend us a boat, I am sure.'

Down he went full of eagerness, his handsome face flushed with excitement. Mrs. Radcliffe had joined two or three ladies, and stood with them asking questions of Mr. Cocker about the corvette and the wreck. On glancing through the skylight presently, I saw the lieutenant picking a piece of cold fowl at the table, with a bottle of champagne at his elbow. Old Keeling sat at his side, and opposite were Colledge and Miss Temple. The four of them were chatting briskly. I took a peep at the boat under the gangway. It was a treat to see the jolly English faces of the fellows, and to hear the tongue of the old home spoken over the side. A number of our seamen had perched themselves on the bulwarks and were calling questions to the men-of-war's-men whilst they watched them draining the glasses which the steward had sent down to them in a basket. From the answers the fellows made I gathered that the *Magicienne* was from Simon's Bay, having been relieved on the coast, where she had been stationed for I will not pretend to remember how long. Small wonder that the bronzed, round-faced, bullet-headed, but exceedingly gentlemanly lieutenant should have fixed a transported eye on the sweet face and golden hair and the violet stars of Miss Hudson after his unendurably long frizzling months of West African beauties.

In about twenty minutes he made his appearance upon deck, followed by Keeling and Miss Temple and Colledge, who came sliding up to me to say that it was all right: the lieutenant would convey us with pleasure and bring us back: and what did I think? Miss Temple was to be of our party.

'Humph!' said I; 'any other ladies?'

He made a grimace. 'No,' he responded in a whisper; 'the lieutenant suggested others; but I could twig in Miss Temple's face that if others went she would remain. You know there's not another woman on board that she cares about. I rather want,' said he, returning to his former voice, 'to introduce her to my cousin. He will be seeing my father when he returns, and is pretty sure to talk,' said he, giving me a wink.

'Does Miss Temple know that you've invited me?'

'She does, Trojan.'

'And how did she receive the news?'

'With rapture,' he cried.

'A fig for such raptures! but I'll go, spite of her delight.'

By this time Miss Temple had made known her intentions to her aunt. I became aware of this circumstance by the old lady uttering a loud shriek.

'It is entirely out of the question; I forbid you to go,' she cried, with a face of agony on her.

'Nonsense!' answered Miss Temple: she and her aunt and old Keeling and the lieutenant were slowly coming towards the break of the poop, where Colledge and I waited whilst this altercation proceeded; so everything said was plainly to be heard by us. 'It

is as calm as a river,' exclaimed the girl, sending one of her flashing looks at the sea.

'You may be drowned; you may never return. I will not permit it. What would your mother think?' cried poor Mrs. Radcliffe vehemently, pecking away with her face, and clapping her hands to emphasise her words.

'Aunt, do not be ridiculous, I beg. I shall go. It will amuse me, and I am already very weary of the voyage. Only consider: at this rate of sailing we may be five or six months longer at sea. This is a little harmless, safe distraction. Now, *don't* be foolish, auntie.'

The old lady appealed to Captain Keeling. He was looking somewhat dubiously round the horizon when the lieutenant broke in; then Colledge indulged in a flourish, and though I can't trace the steps of it, nor recollect the talk, somehow or other a little later on the three of us were in the boat, a bag of letters on a thwart, the lieutenant picking up the yoke-lines as he seated himself, the bow-oar thrusting off, with a vision through the open rail of the poop of old Captain Keeling stiffly sawing the air with his arms, in some effort, as I took it, to console Mrs. Radcliffe, who flourished a handkerchief to her face as though she wept.

CHAPTER XVII

THE 'MAGICIENNE'

THE corvette looked a mighty long distance away from the low elevation of the boat's gunwale—almost as far as the horizon, it seemed to my eyes, though from the height of the deck of the Indiaman the sea-line showed something above the bulwarks of the man-of-war. One hardly noticed the movement in the sea on board the *Countess Ida*, so solemn and steady was the swing of the great fabric, a movement stealing into one's thoughts like a habit, and leaving one unconscious of it; but the heave was instantly to be felt in the boat, and I own that I could not have believed there was so much swell until I felt the lift of the noiseless polished fold and marked the soft blue volume of the water brimming to the hot and blistered sides and green sheathing of the Indiaman.

A huge lump of a ship she looked as we were swept away from her; her masts soaring in three spires with the flash of a vane above the airy gossamer of the loftiest cloths; groups of passengers watching us from the violet-tinted shadow under the awning, heads of seamen at the rail, or figures of them upon the forecastle near the huge cathead that struck a shadow of its own into the water under it. The great bowsprit went tapering to the delicacy of the flying-jib-boom end marshalling the flight of white jibs; a stream of radiance floated in the water under each large window. Inexpressible is the effect she produced, taken along with the dwindling

of her to the impulse of our oars, with the fining down into thinnest notes of the voices of the people, and with the soft and still softening sounds of her canvas lightly swaying.

'A grand old ship,' exclaimed the lieutenant.

'I had no idea she owned such a handsome stern,' said Colledge; 'quite a blaze of gilt, I do protest, Miss Temple. How gloriously old Keeling's cabin-window sparkles amid the gingerbread magnificence of decoration.'

'What is there in the art of painting to reproduce such a picture as that?' exclaimed Miss Temple, with her dark eyes glowing to the mood of delight raised in her by the beautiful spectacle. 'It is like looking at an image in a soap-bubble. What brush could fling those silver-bluish daintinesses of tint upon canvas, and make one see the ship through this atmosphere filled with ocean-light?'

'Ocean-light!' exclaimed the lieutenant, viewing her with an air of profound admiration; 'that is the fit expression, madam. Light at sea is different from light on shore.'

'As how?' cried Colledge.

'Oh, my dear fellow, see what a reflecting eye the ocean has,' said I; 'it stares back in glory to the glory that looks down upon it. Mould and clay can't do that, you know.'

'True,' said the lieutenant.

'Pray,' said I, addressing him, 'when you overhauled that hull yonder, did you meet with anything to warrant our suspicion that she was a rover?'

'I found no papers,' said he; 'forward, she is burnt into a shell. All her guns are gone—dropped overboard, I suppose, to keep her afloat. She has a little round-house aft, and in it sits a man.'

'A man?' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'He sits in a musing posture,' continued the lieutenant; 'he frowns, and seems vexed. He holds a feather pen in one hand, and supports his head on the elbow of his left arm, but he doesn't write: possibly because there is no ink and the wind seems to have blown his paper away.'

'Is he dead?' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'Quite,' responded the lieutenant, with a smile of enjoyment of her beauty.

'God bless me!' cried Colledge, staring at the hull under the sharp of his hand.

'Is she a picaroon, think you, sir?' said I.

'Impossible to say,' he answered; 'there are stands of small-arms in her cabin below, and a sweep of 'tween-decks full of piratic bedding. She will have been crowded with sailors, I should think, sir.'

The six men-of-war's-men were making the fine little cutter hum as they bent to their oars, one hairy face showing past another, the eyes of each man upon his blade, though now and

again one or another would steal a respectful peep at Miss Temple. What exquisite discipline their demeanour suggested! One hardly needed to do more than glance at them to sound to the very depths the whole philosophy of our naval story. How should it be otherwise than as it is with a nation that could be the mother of such children as those fellows?

The lieutenant was very talkative, and had a deal to say about the West Coast of Africa and Cape Town; and he had a great many questions to ask about home. Miss Temple constantly directed her eyes over the side, as though affected and even startled by the proximity of the mighty surface. And boundless the light blue heaving plain looked as it went swimming to the far-off slope of sky that it seemed to wash—the vaster, the more enormous for the breaks of toy-like craft upon it; for the Indiaman and the corvette were standards to assist the mind into some perception of the surrounding immensity, and never to me did the heavens seem so high nor the curve of the ocean boundary so remote as I found them from the low seat of the cutter, with the corvette growing over the bow, and the Indiaman astern dwarfed to the dimensions of a boy's model of a ship.

It was a longer pull than I should have believed, and roastingly hot, thanks to the flaming reflection that filled the heart of the sea, and to the motionless atmosphere, which was scarcely to be stirred even into the subtlest fanning of the cheek by our passage through it. Miss Temple's face in the shadow of her parasol resembled some incomparable carving in marble, and but little of vitality was to be seen in it outside of her rich, full, eloquent eyes, when she fell into some pause of thought and looked away into the dim blue distance as though she beheld a vision down in it. The corvette appeared deserted, with her high bulwarks topped yet with a line of hammocks; but it was easy to see that it was known on board the lieutenant was bringing a lady along with others to visit the man-of-war, for there was already a proper gangway ladder over the side, with a grating to step out on, though the broad-beamed craft swayed more to the swell than the Indiaman, and so dipped the platform that it needed a deal of manœuvring to save Miss Temple from wetting her feet.

Sir Edward Panton, a tall, exceedingly handsome man, with iron-grey hair and a sun-reddened complexion, received us at the gangway. He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes when Colledge called out to him. He welcomed Miss Temple with an air of lofty respectful dignity that would have sat well upon some nobleman of magnificence welcoming a royal visitor to his home. Chairs were brought from the cabin and placed on the quarter-deck in the shelter of the awning, along with a little table, upon which were put some excellent sherry, claret, and seltzer-water, and a box of capital cigars. The look of this ship, after the Indiaman's encumbered decks broken by their poop and topgallant forecastle, was a real treat to the seafaring eye. She was flush fore

and aft: every plank was as white as a peeled almond; the black breeches of her artillery gave a noble, massive, imposing character to her tall, immensely thick bulwarks; the ratlines showed straight as thin bars of iron in the wide spread of shrouds and top-mast rigging; the running gear was flemish-coiled; the brass-work sparkled like burnished gold; the snow-like cloths of the fore-course gathered an amazing brightness from their mere contrast with the red coat of a marine pacing the forecastle; the sailors, in white clothes, straw-hats, and naked feet, sprang softly here and there to the light chirrupings of a pipe, or went on with the various jobs they were about on deck and in the rigging amid a silence that one might ask for in vain among a crew of merchantmen. Far away down upon the starboard beam was the Indiaman, blue in the airy distance, with a sort of winking of shadows upon her square and lofty canvas, as the cloths swung in and out, brightening and dimming.

Sir Edward was delighted to see his cousin, and it seemed as if there was to be no end to their talk, so numberless were the questions the commander put about home, his family, doings in London, matters political, and so on, and so on. I had a chance, whilst Colledge was spinning some long twister of private interest to Sir Edward, to exchange a few words with Miss Temple, whose behaviour in the main might have easily led me to believe that she was absolutely unconscious of my presence; in fact, I shouldn't have addressed her then but for finding in the domestic and personal gossip of the two cousins an obligation of either talking or walking away.

'The *Countess Ida* looks a long distance off, Miss Temple.'

'Farther, I think, than this ship looks from her.'

'That is owing to a change in the atmosphere. We shall be having some weather by-and-by.'

'Not before we return, I hope.'

'The blue thickens yonder,' I exclaimed, indicating that quarter of the sea where I had noticed the depression of the horizon.

She gazed listlessly; her eyes then went roaming over the ship with a sparkle in them of the pleasure the whiteness and the brightness and the orderliness of all that she beheld gave her.

Presently Sir Edward exclaimed: 'Miss Temple, you would like to inspect this vessel, I am sure. I wish to show Stephen my wife's portrait, and I want you to see it. Mr. Dugdale, you will join us.'

Down we went into a very pleasant cabin, and the captain produced a water-colour sketch of his lady.

'A sweet face!' exclaimed Miss Temple; whilst Sir Edward gazed at the picture with eyes full of the yearning heart of a sailor long divorced from his love.

'Have you found your charmer yet, Stephen?' said he. 'Any girl won your budding affections?'

The youth looked at me suddenly and turned of a deep red. I

believe he would have said no at once, and with a cocksure face, had I not been there. Miss Temple's gaze rested upon him.

'Why, who is it, Stephen, eh?' exclaimed Sir Edward with a merry laugh. 'See how he blushes, Miss Temple! A sure sign he has let go his anchor, though he is riding to a long scope all the way out here. Who is it, Steve?'

'Oh, hang it, Ned, never mind; you bother a fellow so,' answered Colledge with a fine air of mingled irritation and confusion, and a half-look at me that was just the same as saying, 'What an ass I am making of myself!'

'Miss Temple,' exclaimed Sir Edward, laughing heartily again, 'he may possibly have confided the lady's name to you. Pray satisfy my curiosity, that I may congratulate him before we part.'

'I am as ignorant as you are,' she replied, with an expression of cold surprise in her face.

I marched to a porthole to look out, that I might conceal an irrepressible grin.

'I say, show us the ship, will ye, Ned?' shouted Colledge; 'there's a long pull before us, and we're bound to India, you know.'

Captain Panton led the way out of the cabin, and went in advance with Miss Temple, pointing here and explaining there, and full of his ship. Colledge sidled up to me.

'Dugdale,' he exclaimed in a whisper, 'do you believe that Miss Temple will guess from my idiotic manner just now that I'm engaged to be married?'

'Oh yes; I saw her gaze sink right into you and then go clean through you. It is best as it is, Colledge. You may breathe freely now.'

He smothered an execration, and continued gloomy and silent for some time. There was not very much to be seen below. We were presently on deck; and after another ten minutes' chat, during which Colledge seemed to regain his spirits, the boat was ordered alongside.

'It shall be my secret as well as yours, Stephen, long before you are home from your tiger-hunts!' exclaimed Sir Edward at the gangway, waggishly shaking his forefinger at his cousin.

We shook hands, entered the boat; the lieutenant took his seat, the oars sparkled, and away we went with a flourish of our hats to the commander, who stood for some time in the open gangway watching us.

'There is a trifle more swell than there was, I fancy,' said I to the lieutenant.

'I think there is,' he answered, looking over the sea as if he thought of something else.

'What a confounded quiz Ned is!' exclaimed Colledge. 'He's rather too fond of a laugh at other people's expense. I think that sort of thing a mistake myself.'

'He is a very handsome gentleman,' said I.

'Well, I'm mighty glad to have seen him,' said Colledge. 'He's

a dear good fellow, only—— I hope you've enjoyed the trip, Miss Temple?'

'Thoroughly, thank you; it is a delightful change. How strange to think of that toy yonder as being our home for some months to come! It is like fancying one's self as dwelling in a star, to see her floating out there in the blue haze, as though she were poised in the atmosphere.'

She fastened her eyes on the Indiaman as she spoke. One saw in this that she had a sailor's observation for atmospheric effect. Star-like the ship looked in the distance—a dash of misty light in the blue haze, hovering, as it were, above the junction of sea and sky, where the blending of the elements was so dim and hot that you couldn't tell where they met.

'Isn't it thickening up a trifle, somehow?' said I to the lieutenant. 'Look to the right of the wreck there—what is that appearance?'

'What do you see?' he exclaimed.

'Why, to my fancy, it is as though there were a dust-storm miles away yonder.'

He smiled, and answered: 'Mere heat. One doesn't need many months on the West African coast to grow used to that sort of aspects. They suggest nothing but quinine to me.'

'What time is it?' said Colledge.

We pulled out our watches: it was half-past four.

'I am sorry we are returning to the Indiaman,' said he. 'I should like to get away from her for a little while; then one would find something of freshness in her when one returned. I am not thirsting to meet Mr. Johnson and Mr. Emmett and Mr. Greenhew again. Are you, Miss Temple?'

She slightly smiled, and said, 'I wish Bombay were as near to us as the *Magicienne* is to the Indiaman.'

'I have an idea!' cried Colledge, whose shining eyes, methought, seemed to suggest the influence of the last large bumper of sherry he had tossed down before leaving the corvette. 'Let us kill another hour by boarding the wreck.'

'I shall be very pleased to put the boat alongside,' said the lieutenant. 'What do you say, Miss Temple?'

She looked at the Indiaman, and then sent a swift glance at me, as though she would read my face without having me know she had peeped at it.

'Will there be time before it falls dark?' she answered. 'I am in no hurry to return; but I do not want to make my aunt miserable by remaining out upon the water until after sunset.'

'Oh, we have abundance of time,' said the lieutenant.

'It will give us so much to talk about,' exclaimed Colledge. 'I want to see what sort of a ship it was that frightened us so abominably the other day.'

'What do you say, Mr. Dugdale?' said Miss Temple.

'I am thinking of the lonely sentinel this gentleman was telling us about as we came along,' said I.

'Oh, one peep! one peep at him, just one peep!' cried Colledge: '*don't* let us go back to the Indiaman too soon. At this rate,' he added, turning up his slightly flushed face to the sky, 'we may have another six months of her.'

The lieutenant laughed, and, anxious to please him, as I supposed, quietly pulled a yoke-line and swept the boat's head fair for the hull. His making nothing of the appearance I had called his attention to was reassuring. I should have thought nothing of it either but for the indent in the horizon that morning, and the recollection that grew out of it, as I have told you. But then old Keeling had let us start from his ship without a hint, and Sir Edward had uttered no caution, though, to be sure, in those days the barometer was not the shaper of marine speculations it has since become; and the smile and careless rejoinder of the lieutenant should have been amply satisfying. Nevertheless, there was no question but that the light swell heaving out of the north-west was sensibly gaining in volume and speed, and that it was the mere respiration of the ocean I could by no means persuade myself, though it might signify nothing.

Colledge grew somewhat frolicsome; indeed, I seemed to find an artificiality in his spirits, as though he would clear Miss Temple's memory of Captain Panton's *badinage* by laughter and jokes. The lieutenant fell in with his humour, said some comical things, and told one or two lively anecdotes of the blacks of that part of the coast the corvette was fresh from. The men-of-war's-men pulled steadily, and the keen stem of the cutter sheared through the oil-smooth surface with a noise as of the ripping of satin; but now and again she would swing down into a hollow that put the low sides of the wreck out of sight, whilst, as we approached, I noticed that the hull was leaning from side to side in a swing which did not need to greatly increase to put the lieutenant to his trumps to get Miss Temple aboard.

But by this time the girl was showing some vivacity, smiling at the lieutenant's jokes, laughing lightly in her clear, rich, trembling tones at Colledge's remarks. It seemed to me as if her previous quietude had produced a resolution which she was now acting up to. She was apparently eager to inspect the wreck, and said that such an adventure would make a heroine of her at home when she came to tell the story of it.

It was a long, dragging pull over that heaving, breathless sea, and through that sweltering afternoon, with its sky of the complexion of brass above the zenith. The three craft, as they lay, formed a right angle triangle, the apex, to call it so, being the derelict, and the getting to her involved a longer stretching of the Jacks' backs than, as I suspected, the lieutenant had calculated on. The sweat poured from the men's brows, and their faces were like purple rags under their straw hats as they swung with the precision and the monotony of the tick of a clock over the looms of their oars.

'She's rather unsteady, isn't she?' exclaimed Colledge as we approached the hulk.

'So much the better,' said the lieutenant; 'her bulwarks are gone, and every dip inclines her bare deck as a platform for a jump.'

'She may be sinking,' cried Miss Temple.

'Dry as a bone, madam, I assure you,' said the officer. 'I looked into her hold, and there's scarce more water than would serve to drown a rat.'

'I see her name in long white letters under her counter,' I exclaimed. 'Can you read it, Colledge?'

'The *Aspirante*,' said the lieutenant.

We now fell silent, with our eyes upon the hull, whilst the officer manœuvred with the yoke-lines to run the cutter handsomely alongide. A single chime from a bell came thrilling with a soft silver note through the hushed air. Miss Temple started, and the officer grinned into Colledge s face, but nothing was said. She was a very clean wreck. Her foremast stood stoutly supported by the shrouds; but the braces of the foreyard were slack, and the swing of the spar, upon which the canvas lay rolled in awkward heaps, roughly secured by lines, as though the work of hands wild with hurry, somehow imparted a strange, forlorn, most melancholy character to the nakedness of that solitary mast. She showed no guns; her decks appeared to have been swept; the rise of her in the water proved that her people must have jettisoned a deal of whatever they were able to come at; her wheel was gone, and her rudder slowly swayed to every heave. There were a few ropes' ends over her side, the hacked remains of standing rigging; but the water brimmed clear of wreckage to her channels.

'Oars!' cried the lieutenant. The bowman sprang erect; and in a few moments we were floating alongside, soaring and falling against the black run of her, with the deck gaping through the length of smashed bulwark to the level of our heads when we stood up, each time she came lazily rolling over to us. The clear chime of the bell rang out again.

'What is it?' cried Miss Temple.

'The ship's bell,' said the lieutenant; 'it has got jammed as it hangs, and the tongue strikes the side when the heave is a little sharper than usual.'

He followed this on with certain directions to the men. Two of them, watching their chance, sprang on to the slope of the deck, and then went hoisting up away from us as the hull swayed wearily to starboard. 'Stand by now!' bawled the lieutenant. 'Miss Temple, let me assist you on to this thwart.' She leapt upon it with something of defiance in her manner, and the officer, grasping her elbow, supported her. I thought Colledge looked a little uneasy and pale. We waited; but an opportunity was some time in coming.

'Mr. Colledge, said the lieutenant, 'be kind enough to take

my place and support the lady.' He jumped lightly into the main chains, and was on deck in a jiffy. 'Haul her in close, men. Now, Miss Temple. Catch hold of my hand and of this sailor's when I say so.'

Up swung the boat; the girl extended her hands, which were instantly grasped. 'Jump, madam!' and she went in a graceful bound from the thwart to the deck.

I watched till a heave brought me on a line with the chains, into which I jumped.

'Now, Mr. Colledge!' called out the lieutenant. He hung in the wind, and I thought he would refuse to leave the boat; but Miss Temple with her face slightly flushed stood watching as though waiting for him, her noble figure swaying with a marvellous careless grace upon the floating slopes of the planks; and this started him. He got on to a thwart, where he was supported by a sailor till a chance offered for his hands to be gripped, and then he was hauled on to the hull; but he came perilously near to going overboard, for the sudden sinking away of the cutter from under him paralysed his effort to jump, and he swung against the side of the wreck in the grasp of the lieutenant and a seaman, who dragged him up just in time to save his legs from being ground by the soaring of the boat. The two sailors then jumped into the cutter, which shoved off, and lay rising and falling upon the quarter to the scope of her painter.

CHAPTER XVIII

ADRIFT

THERE was a small deck-house standing abaft the jagged ends of the stump of the mainmast, a low-pitched, somewhat narrow, and rather long structure, with a door facing the wheel, or where the wheel had stood, and a couple of small windows on either hand, the glass of which was entirely gone.

'The lonely watchman of this wreck is still at home, doubtless waiting to receive us,' said the lieutenant, pointing to the little building. 'Shall we pay him a visit?'

'Oh, yes; let us see everything that there may be to look at,' answered Colledge, who had not yet recovered his breath, but who was working hard, I could see, to regain his late air of vivacity, though he was pale, and shot several uneasy glances around him as he spoke.

'I would rather not look,' said Miss Temple; 'it will make me dream.'

'You will have nothing to talk about, then,' said Colledge.

'It is the most natural object in the world,' exclaimed the lieutenant; 'if he could be stuffed, preserving the posture he is

in, and exhibited in London, thousands would assemble to view him.'

I left them to persuade Miss Temple if they could, and walking aft, opened the door, and peeped in. It was just a plain, immensely strong, roughly furnished deck erection, with a small hatch close against the entrance, conducting, as I supposed, to the cabin beneath. On either side went a row of lockers; in the centre was a short narrow table, supported by stanchions; and at this table sat the figure of a man. He was in an attitude of writing; his right hand grasped a long feather pen; his left elbow was on the table, and his cheek was supported by his hand. He was dressed in white jean breeches, the ends of which were stuffed into a pair of yellow leather half-boots. There was a large belt round his waist, clasped by some ornament resembling a two-headed eagle, of a shining metal, probably silver. His shirt was a pale red flannel, over which was a jacket cut in the Spanish fashion; his hair was long, and flowed in black ringlets upon his back. His hat was a large sombrero, and I had to walk abreast of him to see his face. I was prepared to witness a ghastly sight. Instead, I beheld a countenance of singular beauty. It was as if the hand of death had moulded some faultless human countenance out of white wax. The lids of the eyes drooped, and the gaze seemed rooted upon the table, as though the man lay rapt and motionless in some sweet and perfect dream. His small moustache was like a touch of delicate pencilling. He looked to have been a person of some three or four and twenty years of age.

As I stood surveying the figure, the interior was shadowed. Miss Temple and the others stood in the doorway. The lieutenant and Colledge entered; the girl would not approach.

'Here, Miss Temple,' said I, 'is the handsomest man I have ever seen.'

'Can he be dead?' exclaimed Colledge in a subdued voice of awe.

'He'll never be deader,' said the lieutenant, peering curiously into the face of the corpse. '*Handsome*, do you consider him, sir? Well, we all have our tastes, to be sure. He looks like a woman masquerading.'

'Who was he, I wonder?' asked Miss Temple in a low tone, standing in a half-shrinking attitude at the door.

'Very hard to say,' said I. 'Too young for the captain, I should think. Probably the mate.'

'A pirate, anyway,' said the lieutenant.

'Hark!' cried Miss Temple; 'this ship is tolling his knell.'

The mellow chime floated past the ear. The effect was extraordinary, so clear was the note as it rang through the soft sounds of the weltering waters; so ghostly, wild, and unreal, too, the character it gathered from the presence of that silent, stirless penman.

'I say, we've seen enough of him, I think,' exclaimed Colledge.

'Shall we bury him?' said I.

'Oh no, sir,' exclaimed the lieutenant; 'this sheer hulk is his coffin. Leave the dead to bury their dead. Now for a glimpse of the cabin.'

Miss Temple entered with some reluctance; the lieutenant handed her through the hatch down the short ladder, and Colledge and I followed. We found ourselves in a moderately-sized state-room of the width of the little vessel, with bulkheads at either end, each containing a couple of cabins. There was a small sky-light overhead, all the glass of it shattered, but light enough fell through to enable us to see easily. Colledge had plucked up heart, and now bustled about somewhat manfully, opening the cabin doors, starting as if he saw horrible sights, cracking jokes as in the boat, and calling to Miss Temple to look here and to look there, and so on.

'Hallo!' cried the lieutenant, putting his head into one of the cabins at the fore end of the state-room; 'I missed this room when I overhauled her. What have we here? A pantry is it, or a larder?'

I looked over his shoulder, and by the faint light sifting through the bull's-eye in the deck, made out the contents of what was apparently a storeroom. There were several shelves containing crockery, cheeses, hams, and other articles of food. Under the lower shelf, heaped upon the deck, were stowed several dozens of bottles in straw.

'The corsairs,' said the lieutenant, 'will always be memorable for the excellence of their tipple. What is this, now?'

He picked up a bottle, knocked off the head, and taking a little tin drinking-vessel from a shelf, half filled it, then smelled, and tasted.

'An exquisite Burgundy!' he cried. 'Try it, Mr. Dugdale.'

It was indeed a very choice sound wine. The lieutenant half filled a pannikin for Colledge, who emptied it with a sigh of enjoyment. 'What would my father give for such stuff as this!' said he.

The lieutenant found a wine-glass, which he carefully cleansed with the liquor, and then filling it, he asked Miss Temple to drink to the confusion of all pirates. She laughed, and declined.

'Oh, you must sip it, if you please,' cried Colledge, 'if only to heighten the romance of this adventure. Think of the additional colour your story will get out of this incident of drinking perdition to the corsairs in wine of their own!'

She was about to answer, when the hull rolled heavily. The lieutenant slipped; the wine-glass fell to the deck, and was shivered; Colledge, grasping me to steady himself, threw me off my balance, and the pair of us went rolling to the bottles. The young fellow scrambled on to his legs with a loud laugh.

'I believe this vessel is tipsy,' said he.

'Do you mark the increase in the weight of the swell?' I exclaimed as I regained my legs.

The roll of the vessel the other way had been severe, and now she was dipping her sides regularly with an oscillation extravagant enough to render standing very inconvenient.

'We must be off, I think,' said the lieutenant.

'Miss Temple hasn't drunk confusion to the pirates,' exclaimed Colledge, with the persistency of brains flushed with wine.

'I would rather not do so,' she answered, her fine face looking curiously pale in that dull light, whilst she glanced restlessly towards the state cabin. She pulled out a little watch. 'It is certainly time to return to the Indiaman,' she added.

'Oh, but don't let us leave all this noble drink to go down to the bottom of the sea,' cried Colledge. 'Is there nothing that we can pack some of the bottles in? If we could only manage to get away with a couple of dozen—twelve for ourselves and twelve for my cousin?'—and with red face and bright eyes he went staggering with the heave of the hull to the shelves and stood holding on, looking about him.

'It might be managed, I think,' said the lieutenant, who seemed all anxiety to oblige him.

'I wish to be gone,' exclaimed Miss Temple with a strong hint of the imperiousness that had been familiar to me in the Indiaman in the air with which she looked at and addressed the lieutenant. 'What is the meaning of this increased rolling? I shall not be able to enter the boat.'

'No fear of that, madam,' answered the lieutenant; 'a dismasted egg-shell like this will roll to the weakest heave. A trifle more swell has certainly set in, but it is nothing.'

I was not so sure of that. What he was pleased to describe as a trifling increase was to my mind, and very distinctly too, a heightening and broadening of the undulations, of which the significance was rendered strong by the suddenness of the thing. It meant wind close at hand, I could swear.

'I'll go on deck and see how things are,' said I.

'Take me with you, Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'You will suffer me to assist you?' said the lieutenant.

'Oh, I say, *don't* leave all this wine here,' cried Colledge. 'Mr.—I mean Lieutenant—upon my word, I must apologise for not having asked your name—can't we manage to find some old basket——'

'What is that down in the corner there, Mr. Colledge?' said the lieutenant, laughing.

'Pray, take me on deck, Mr. Dugdale!' exclaimed Miss Temple haughtily and with temper, and she came to my side and passed her arm through mine.

The swaying of the light hull without top-hamper to steady her so hindered one's movements by the staggering lurches it flung one into, that it cost me no small effort to steer a fair course with Miss Temple hanging to me, to the cabin steps. I helped her up the ladder, and felt in her arm the shudder that swept through

her as she sent a single swift glance at the dead figure at the table.

The moment I emerged I cried out: 'My God! see there! Why, if we are not quick——' And putting my head into the doorway again, I roared down the hatch: 'For heaven's sake, come on deck, or we shall lose both ships!'

Indeed, all away in the north-west was a white blankness of vapour bearing right down upon the hull, with a long and heavy swell rolling out of it, the heads of which as they came washing from under the base of the thickness were dark with wind. The sky overhead was of a sort of watery ashen colour, going down to the eastern sea-line in a weak dim blue, so obscure with the complexion of the approaching vaporous mass that the corvette on the left hand and the Indiaman on the right appeared as little more than pallid smudges, with a kind of looming out of their dull, distorted proportions that made them show as though they hung upon the very verge of the ocean. I told Miss Temple to hold to the side of the deck-house to steady herself, and rushed to the quarter. The cutter lay there to the scope of her painter, rising and falling in a manner bewildering to see to one who knew that she had to be entered from these perilously sloping decks. The moment my head was seen, one of the sailors bawled out: 'The Indiaman's fired two guns, sir.'

'Why the deuce,' I shouted in a passion, 'didn't one of you jump aboard to report what was coming? Haul alongside, for God's sake.'

At this moment the lieutenant appeared, followed by Colledge. He took one look, and came in a bound to the sheer edge of the deck, where the remains of the line of crushed bulwarks stood like fangs. 'Lively now!' he cried: 'hand over hand with it.'

We shall be smothered out of sight in a few minutes,' I exclaimed; 'shall we be acting wisely in quitting this hull? We may lose both ships in that weather there, and what will there be to do then?'

'Don't frighten the lady, sir,' he answered, turning upon me with a frown. 'Miss Temple, there is nothing to be alarmed at. We shall get you into the boat simply enough, and the vapour will speedily clear. I know these waters.'

Colledge stood gazing round him, looking horribly frightened. The boat was dragged alongside: one moment she was above the level of the naked edge of the deck; the next she was sliding away out of sight into the hollow, with the wreck rolling heavily off from her.

'Now, Miss Temple,' cried the lieutenant. 'Help me to steady the lady, Mr. Dugdale. Stand by, two of you men there, to receive her.'

Miss Temple set her lips, and her eyes were on fire with anger and fear. 'I shall not be able to enter that boat,' said she.

'Oh, madam, be persuaded,' cried the lieutenant, speaking

irritably out of his clear perception of the danger of delay and of the peril of passing her into the cutter. 'Mr. Dugdale, take Miss Temple's arm.'

She shrank back, with a firmer grip of the deck-house, against which she had set her shoulder to steady herself. 'You will kill me!' she cried.

'Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed the lieutenant wildly, 'for God's sake, jump into the boat, that Miss Temple may see how easily it is to be done. I must be the last to leave.'

'Let Mr. Colledge jump first,' said I. 'I may probably be more useful to you and the lady than he.'

'Jump, Mr. Colledge!' cried the lieutenant.

The young fellow went to the edge of the deck. 'I shall break my neck,' he shouted; 'I shall fall into the sea; I shall be drowned.'

'No, sir! no, sir!' roared one of the seamen; 'jump as the boat lifts; we'll catch you.'

'*Now!*' cried the lieutenant.

Colledge sprang; down sank the boat out of sight; then up she soared again with Colledge safe in the embrace of one of the most powerful of the sailors.

'Here it comes!' said I.

As the words left my lips, the wind, with a long fierce howl, swept over the deck of the hull, and a moment later the fog was boiling all about us. It was like a mighty burst of steam; and in a breath the ocean vanished, and there was nothing to see but the wool-white blankness and a space of thirty or forty feet of water beyond the wreck. All on a sudden, the lieutenant, who had gone to the edge of the deck, perhaps to see how it was with Colledge, or to bawl some further directions to the seamen, staggered to a deep and swinging heel of the hull and went overboard. It happened in a second. My instant impression was that he had jumped for the boat; but I knew better when I heard the men roaring out.

'For heaven's sake, Miss Temple,' I cried, 'keep a firm hold, and do not attempt to stir, or the angle of the decks will certainly rush you over the side.'

So saying, I staggered to the quarter where there were some eight or ten feet of bulwarks still standing, and looked over. The men had let go the painter of their boat, and were shouting instructions to one another as some of them flung their oars over into the rowlocks, whilst others overhung the gunwale eagerly with pale faces and looks of consternation and dread, searching the round volumes of the swell, which the wind was now whipping into yeast, for any signs of their officer.

'Keep alongside!' I bellowed; 'he will rise near.'

But the fellows were distracted, unnerved, and there was nobody to give them orders. The howling of the wind, the sudden leaping down upon them of this blindness of white vapour, the

violent upheavals and sinkings of the cutter upon the run of the liquid hills, heavily increased the distraction raised in them by the lieutenant's disappearance. They had three oars out, possessed, I suppose, by some mad fancy of merely paddling whilst they stared round the water; and even whilst I watched them, and whilst I yelled to them to get their six oars over, and to pull for their lives to alongside the wreck, the boat, yielding to the full weight of the blast and to the long irresistible heavings of the swell, faded out of sight in the flying thickness; and ere I could fully realise what had occurred, the narrow space of foam-freckled pouring waters showed blank to where the flying vapour seemed to hang like a wall of white smoke.

I continued to stare, occasionally bringing my eyes away from the spot where the boat had vanished to the water alongside; but the lieutenant had sunk. There could be no doubt that the poor fellow on rising from his first dive had struck the bends of the hull as she rolled heavily over to the trough where he had vanished, and so had been drowned, struck down again into the depths, to rise no more. I could not realise the truth. I felt as if I had fallen crazy, and was imagining dreadful horrors. It was but a minute or two before that he had turned to me with a frown—it was but a little while before that he was full of jokes and laughter in the cabin—and now he lay a dead man, sinking and yet sinking under our heaving and plunging keel, dead as the figure yonder in that little cabin, of whom he had spoken jestingly so lately that the words and tone of his voice were still in my ear!

'Where is the boat, Mr. Dugdale?'

I turned slowly round and looked at the girl with an air of stupefaction, then stared again into the blankness, and with shuddering heart swept my eyes over the water alongside, brimming in humpbacked rounds to the very line of the deck, and sweeping away into the near thickness with a spitting and seething and flashing of foam off each long slant to the fierce shrill smiting of the wind.

'Has the boat left us, Mr. Dugdale?'

With a desperate effort I rallied myself, and watching for my chances betwixt the wild slopings of the deck, I reached the deck-house, and held on by the girl's side.

'The boat has been blown away. The men fell imbecile, I do believe, when they saw their officer drop overboard. What madmen to let go the painter, to manœuvre with three oars in a heavy cutter in the teeth of such a wind as this, and on the top of that swell!'

'Did they recover the lieutenant?' she asked.

'No.'

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' she shrieked, 'do you tell me he is drowned?'

'Yes—yes—he is drowned,' I answered, scarce able to articulate for the sudden fit of horror that came upon me again.

'Drowned!' she exclaimed. 'Oh no—not so suddenly! He may be struggling close against the vessel now'—she moved as if to go to the side to look. I grasped her arm.

'Do not stir,' I cried; 'the slope of the deck will carry you overboard. It is all open to the water abreast of us.'

'Shocking! It is unendurable! Drowned so swiftly! And the boat—the boat, Mr. Dugdale?'

The cruel distress in her voice, the anguish of mind expressed in her parted lips, her heaving breast, her strained, brilliant, wide-open staring looks about her, obliged me to recollect myself by forcing me to understand my obligations as a man.

'Miss Temple, this fog may prove but a passing thickness. There is a clear sky over it, and when the vapour settles away, the sea will open to its confines. The Indiaman knows we are here. We were watched, too, from the corvette, no doubt, and she must regain her boat besides. The cutter is a powerful little fabric, and there is nothing as yet in this weather or in that sea to hurt her. It is a hard experience for you; but it will prove a brief one only, I am sure. Let me assist you to a seat in this deck-house. Your having to hold on here is fatiguing and dangerous.'

'I could not enter whilst that man is there,' she exclaimed. 'Oh, hark to that bell!' she cried hysterically; it is tolling for *us* now!'

'You must be sheltered,' I exclaimed; 'and that body must come out of it. Will you sit on the deck? You will be safer so.'

She sank down; and to still further secure her, I went sliding and clawing like a monkey to the quarter, where, with my knife, I severed an end of rope—a piece of gear belayed to a pin—with which I returned to her side. I passed the line round her waist, and firmly attached the ends to one of several iron uprights which supported the structure; and begging her to compose her mind, and not to doubt of our deliverance within the next two or three hours, I entered the little building.

It was a loathsome job; but the girl must be sheltered, and it was not to be borne that she should have such a companion as that corpse, when there was the great graveyard of the sea within an easy drag to receive the body. Yet I must own to coming to a stand with a long look at the silent figure before I could muster up stomach enough to lay hands upon him. Indeed, as I now fixed my eyes on the body, I wondered whether he could be really dead, so startlingly lifelike was his posture, so pensive his air, so vital the aspect of him to the minutest feature, down to the pen betwixt his fingers, and the reposeful position of his small wax-white hand upon the table. How could I tell but that he might be in some sort of trance, and that my heaving him overboard would be the same as murdering him? However, after a spell of staring, I shook off these alarms and conjectures, and grasping him by the arm, got him upon the deck; and presently I had him abreast of that part of the brig's side where the bulwarks were gone; and

trembling as violently as though I were about to drown a living being, I waited for a roll of the hull, then gave the body a heave, and away it went, striking the swell in a diving attitude, and floating off and down into it, as if it swam.

This done, I crept back to Miss Temple and squatted beside her.

CHAPTER XIX

NIGHT

THE wind blew hard, and the vapour swept past in a horizontal pouring, masses of it coming on a sudden in a blinding thickness till you could not see half the wreck's length; then the silver-tinted volumes would brighten for a breath or two, and show the steel-coloured sea heaving its freckled and foamless folds into the vaporous faintness a few hundred feet off; then the mist would boil down and over us once more until it was like being in a room filled with steam.

'The cabin is empty,' said I—the girl being on the port side, I had taken care to drag the body to starboard—'there are seats, and you will be sheltered there. This is damping stuff.'

'Not yet,' she answered. 'I am as safe here. I hate the thought of having anything to screen the sea from me. I want to look—at any moment the Indiaman or the man-of-war may come close to us.'

'Be it so,' said I. 'Heavens, how rapidly has all this happened! One of the cutter's men shouted to me that the Indiaman had fired two guns. Why did they not report this to us? Did they believe the swell would not let them get aboard? They saw—of course they saw—this fog bearing down; why did not the madmen let us know of it?'

'What will my aunt think?'

'Why, she will be in a terrible fright. But it will not last. We shall be picked up presently. I would rather be here than in the cutter. If they are wise, they will ride to their oars; if they row or allow the wind and seas to drive them, they are bound to lose both ships, the night being at hand; and then God help them!'

'Oh, it was an evil moment,' she cried, 'when we sighted the corvette!'

'It was an evil moment,' I exclaimed bitterly and wrathfully, 'when Mr. Colledge, who had undoubtedly taken too much wine on board the *Magicienne*, suggested that we should kill an hour on this hull. Where,' I cried passionately, 'could the unhappy lieutenant's wits have been? He laughed at me for indicating the appearance I witnessed in the north-west. Was there nothing in the weight of this swell to convince him that there must be mischief not far off?'

'What will my aunt think?' she repeated, as though she scarcely heeded my words, whilst she brought her hands, brilliant with rings, together and stared into the thickness with her eyes on fire with fear and amazement and the score of wild emotions which filled her.

Though I held my peace on the subject, the wind, that was blowing with the spite of an ugly squall, was exciting an alarm in me that rose above all other considerations of our situation. The hatches lay open, and there was nothing to be seen of their covers about the decks. If this weather continued, a high sea must presently follow, in which case there could be nothing to save the wreck from filling and foundering. The lieutenant had assured us that she was dry; but it was certain that she had been badly wrenched by the lightning stroke that had dismasted and apparently set her on fire forward, and, by the furious gale that had chased her afterwards; and though she may have been tight when the lieutenant overhauled her, this constant working in the strong swell might at any instant cause her to start a butt or open a seam, and then what should I be able to do? Both pumps were smashed level to the deck; there was no boat; there was nothing discoverable fore and aft which I could launch and secure my companion and myself to. It was with inexpressible anxiety, therefore, that I would send my gaze from time to time to windward, in the hope of observing a thinning in the thickness there, or any the faintest imaginable sign to elate me with the belief that the worst of the fog was on us, that we were now feeling the worst of the wind, and that the ocean would be clearing soon.

The time passed. I looked at my watch after we had been sitting a little, and found it six o'clock. The sun would be setting in something more than an hour, and a bitter black night was bound to follow if the vapour had not cleared when daylight ended. There was now a smart sea running, but the swell had flattened something, I thought. The hull was horribly frisky, leaning at desperate angles from side to side, and often recovering herself with a jerk that must have flung us to the deck had we not been seated. But she was extraordinarily light, and floated very tall, and though there would sometimes come a blow of salt water against the bow that flashed across the deck in a mass of foam and green crystals, yet she soared so nimbly to the height of every surge that she took in amazingly little water. Indeed, it was not long before I felt myself infinitely comforted by her behaviour, convinced that it would have to breeze up with much more spite than the wind now had to put us in jeopardy from a filling hold.

Shortly before the hour of sundown, I induced Miss Temple to occupy the deckhouse. She entered with a great deal of reluctance, and seated herself in a corner that was the furthest away from where the body had been. It had not been very easy to converse outside. The ceaseless roaring and washing noises of the water,

with the alarming thumps and leapings of froth at the bow, and the sounds of the rushing wind sweeping in gusty cries over the mutilated rails of the hull as she was hove up full into it, and then sinking into a sort of humming moaning as the wreck drove down the liquid acclivity into the swift comparative stillness of the trough: all this was distracting and terrifying, and speech had been difficult. But the interior of the deck-house was a shelter to the ear and voice. I seated myself opposite the girl, giving her as wide, respectful a berth as the narrow cabin permitted. The shadow of the evening lay already sullen in the white mist that seemed to boil upon the wind, though at that hour it was not so thick but that the gaze might be able to penetrate a distance of a quarter of a mile. Miss Temple was deadly pale. Even her lips had lost their delicate rosy tint, and sat blanched in their compression. Her eyes looked preternaturally large, and there was an expression of passionate desperation in them, as one might figure of some proud, high-spirited creature driven at bay, and rounding upon the pursuer with a gaze charged with despair and wrath and the misery of some heart-breaking resolution.

'I believe I shall go mad,' she said, 'if this fog does not cease. I feel as though I were now insane, and that what we are suffering is the imagination of madness.'

'It is a frightful time of suspense,' I answered; 'we must have patience: there is no other medicine for this sort of affliction.'

'I could stab myself,' she cried, 'for being in this position. There is the Indiaman close at hand; I see her saloon cheerful with lamplight, the tables glittering, the passengers seated, talking and laughing, without a thought of us by this time.' I shook my head. She continued: 'I think of the security, the comfort of that ship, which I never once reflected on when in her. And now contrast this!'

She rolled her wonderful eyes over the narrow compartment in a shuddering way that was eloquent with abhorrence.

'Why am I here? It is my own fault. I could stab myself for my folly.'

It made one think of some beautiful wild creature newly caged to watch her.

'It is bad enough,' said I; 'but it might be much worse. Think of yourself in that open boat—on this high sea, and amidst this blinding vapour: no water, no food, the blackness of the night coming down, and a thousand leagues of ocean all around you.'

'Is not the cutter safer than this horrible wreck?' she cried. 'If the morning exposes the ships to the people in her, they can row; but what can we do?'

'If the morning exposes the ships,' said I, 'they'll see us, and very joyfully attempt to fetch us—that is to sail to us.'

She turned to look through a window the glass of which was gone, and through which the wind was shrilling as though it blew into a cylinder. It was fast darkening. In these latitudes twi-

light is brief, and in such weather as this there would be none. It was little more now than sombre blank greyness outside, with a sight of the steel-coloured swell, over whose humps the seas were rushing in foam, shouldering and vanishing into the thickness. But there was no increase in the wind, and the run of the surge did not gain in weight.

I watched the girl while she looked through the window. It is not in language to convey the tragic irony that was put into our situation by her sparkling holiday attire. Her dress was of some white material, of a silken or lustrous nature, that most perfectly fitted the beauties of her person. Her hat was some rich combination of richly plumed straw. She had removed her gloves on descending into the cabin of the hull when we boarded her, and many rings of splendour and value flashed on her fingers in a very armour of jewels and gold. There were gems in her ears, and a heavy chain of gold round her neck, terminating in a whole cluster of trinkets at her girdle, in which was sheathed a watch of the size of her thumb-nail. Think of this glittering figure, this stately, most perfect shape of womanhood in the gloom of the strong, rude interior of the deck-house, with its few rough details of fittings in the shape of a table and lockers, nothing to see through the window but the rough deck spreading naked to its splinters of bulwark, with the angry foam of waters beyond, and a near sky of fast blackening vapour!

'What are we to do?' she exclaimed, resuming her former attitude and fixing her large desperate eyes upon me.

'We must wait,' said I.

'You have been a sailor, Mr. Dugdale; tell me what you think.'

'Well, first of all, we must be prepared to spend the night on this wreck'——She flashed her hands to her face and held them there, and I waited for her to look at me again. 'This weather,' I proceeded, 'is not likely to last very long. The dawn will probably exhibit a clear sky. If the ships are not in sight'—she drew in her breath with an hysterical 'Oh'—'they will still have the bearings of the wreck, and search for us. Were there but a single vessel to hunt after the hull, we might still feel perfectly safe; but there are two, and one of them is an English man-of-war.'

'But will Sir Edward Panton know that we are here?'

'No doubt. He or others will have seen the cutter deviate for the wreck instead of pulling for the Indiaman.'

'But they may think we are in the boat; and if she is not recovered, they will search for her, and not trouble themselves about the wreck.'

'We must be hopeful, and we must be patient,' said I.

It was now rapidly growing dark. The white waters showed ghastly over the edge of the bare deck to each convulsive jerking roll of the hull, and my companion's white face was little more than a glimmer in the gloom of the corner in which she sat. The

thought of the long black hours which lay before us was intolerable. I looked about me for a lamp, but there was nothing of the kind, nor hook nor bracket to prove that a lamp or lantern was ever used in this small abode. I told Miss Temple that I would go below and search for something wherewith to make a light.

'Will you be long?' she asked.

'I'll make haste,' said I.

'Yes, if you please, Mr. Dugdale,' she exclaimed.

I had in my pocket the old-fashioned arrangement of tinder-box and sulphur matches, being, indeed, too confirmed a smoker to stir very far without that convenience. The mere descent of the steps was a horrible labour, owing to the extravagant leaps and rolls of the mere shell of wreck, and my progress was scarcely more than inch by inch, forced to hold on as I was with the tenacity of the grip of a parrot's beak. The straining noises in the cabin might have easily led me to suppose that the hull was going to pieces. Every blow of the sea trembled through her down here as though the fabric forward were breaking up, and I recollect swinging by a stanchion for some minute or two, overwhelmed with the consternation excited in me by the sounds, and by a sudden recollection of the lieutenant's words that the brig in her forecastle had been burnt out. But I had promised Miss Temple to be speedy; and the thought of her sitting lonely above in terror and despair brought my mind back to its bearings.

It was almost pitch-dark, but remembering the situation of the pantry in which the lieutenant had cracked the bottle of wine, I dropped on my hands and knees, not daring to trust my feet, and crawled towards it. When I guessed by groping that I was near the door, I kindled a match and entered the pantry; and after consuming about half-a-dozen matches, I met with a tin box that was full of long wax candles, which looked to me very much like a sample of booty, as it was scarcely to be supposed that a vessel of the class of the *Aspirante* would lay in stores of that quality. I hunted for a candlestick, and found a small empty pickle bottle, which would very well answer the purpose of holding the candle. This I squeezed under my waistcoat, and filled my coat-pockets with a couple of bottles of wine, a handful of ship's biscuit, and a little tin drinking-vessel; and then putting the box of candles under my arm, I fell again upon my hands and knees, crawled to the cabin ladder, and joined the deck-house so wearied by the posture I had been forced to adopt and by the convulsive motions of the deck, which had put an aching as of rheumatism into every bone, that I was forced to sit and remain quiet for some minutes.

The wind swept in through the denuded windows; but the structure, as I have before said, was long in proportion to its width, and at the fore-end the atmosphere was quiet enough for a candle to burn in. I secured the empty pickle bottle to a stanchion with my handkerchief, and placed the lighted candle in it; and the square of the bottle held the flame at a sufficient distance from

the stanchion to provide against all risk of fire. The light seemed to raise some little heart in Miss Temple.

'You are brave,' she exclaimed, with a glance at the black square of the hatch, 'to descend into that dreadful dungeon. There may be dead bodies there.'

'I am not afraid of dead bodies,' said I. 'I wish there were nothing more harmful in this world than dead men. Here are two bottles of wine and some biscuit. You will be the better for a little refreshment.'

I knocked off the head of a bottle and handed her a draught. She looked at the rough drinking-vessel for a little and then said with a painful smile: 'A desperate change, Mr. Dugdale, from the table of the Indiaman! Will this wine hurt me?'

'I will drink first, to reassure you, if you please,' said I.

'No,' she exclaimed; 'I must not be too cowardly;' and she drank.

I took a good drain myself, and found it the same noble wine that the poor lieutenant had tasted.

'Try one of these biscuits, Miss Temple,' said I; 'they are but coarse eating for you, I fear; they are the bread that poor Jack is fed on.'

She took one and nibbled at it.

'Ha!' said I, 'this is an ocean experience indeed. This is being shipwrecked. You will have a deal more to talk about when you get home than Colledge could have dreamt of in proposing this excursion for that purpose. Can you bite that biscuit?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'It is rather flinty,' said I, munching. 'There should be something more relishable than this to be come at below. I will make another hunt.'

'No, if you please,' she cried vehemently; 'do not leave me, Mr. Dugdale.'

'Ay, but food apart, since we must needs remain here through the night, I must endeavour to find something soft for you to lie upon. You cannot rest upon that hard locker.'

'Oh, I do not want to rest,' she exclaimed. 'Do you think I could sleep? I shall sit as I am, and pray for the light to come and for a sight of the ships.'

I made no answer, though it was on the tip of my tongue to say I was sorry for her sake that it was I, and not Colledge, whom she was adrift with. It was an impulse coming through some sudden hot recollection of her treatment of me on board the *Countess Ida*; but I bit my lip, and was grateful for my silence a moment after, when I saw her fine eyes swimming with tears.

'Pray have hope,' I exclaimed. 'I am sure after a bit you will find plenty of courage in your heart to confront this little passage, hard as it is. I will do what I can. I would you had a better sailor than I by your side; but what can be done by me shall be done, and the worst is a long way off yet, I am certain.'

She put her hands upon the table and hid her face in them. I lifted the lid of the locker I was using as a seat, to stow away the bottles in a safe place; for, talk as I might, it was only God could know whether it might not end in a single drop of the liquor becoming more precious to us than twenty times the value of the cargo of the Indiaman. There were some wearing apparel, a few small coils of ratline-stuff, and other odds and ends in the locker, but nothing noticeable. I then clawed my way to the deck-house door to take a look round. It was black as fog and darkness could make it. Close alongside, the foam glanced dimly, with now and again a flash of phosphoric light in some dark coil down whose slope the hull was sliding; but there was nothing else to see. The wind still blew fresh, but there was no recognisable increase in it since the hour of its first coming down upon the wreck. It made a most dismal and melancholy noise of howling in the sky, as it swept through the dark obscurity, splitting upon the foremast and the shrouds which supported the spar in a low-toned, long-drawn shriek, which had something of the sound of a human note as it pierced through the hissing and seething round about, and through the strange, low, dull thunder made by the shouldering of liquid folds coming together as they ran, and by the hurl of the surge as it rounded and dissolved into foam.

There could be very little doubt that the drift of a light empty shell of a wreck with a yard and mast and shrouds forward for the wind to catch hold of would be considerable in such weather as this. Helped by the beat of the seas, she might easily blow dead to leeward, in the trough as she was, at the rate of some three to four miles in the hour, so that daybreak would find her forty or fifty miles distant from the spot where we had boarded her. However, I comforted myself with the reflection that the commanders of the two ships would have a clear perception of such a drift as I calculated, and allow for it in the search they would surely make for the hull. I had but one fear: that the cutter had been seen leaving the wreck, for there was an interval at least of a minute or two between her dropping astern and manœuvring with her three oars and her envelopment by the fog. If, then, she had been sighted, the inference would inevitably be that Miss Temple, Colledge, and myself were in her; and so the hunt would be for the cutter, without reference to the hull, with every prospect of the search carrying the ships miles below the verge of our horizon.

Meanwhile, as I stood in that doorway looking into the blackness over the sides, I bent my ear anxiously forward; but though there were constant shocks of the sea smiting the bow, I never caught the noise of water falling in weight enough upon the deck to alarm me. The leap of the surge seemed to be always forward of the fore-shrouds, and the ducking and tossing of the fabric was so nimble, and the pouring of the blast so steadfast, that nearly all the water that sprang to the blow of the bow was carried overboard by the wind. This was about as comforting an assurance as could

come to me; for I tell you it was enough to turn one's heart into lead to look into that starless wall of blackness close against the ship, to see nothing but the pallid glimmer of froth, to hearken to the noises in the air, to feel the sickening and dizzy heavings of the sea, and then realise that this hull had been struck by lightning, that the forepart of her was burnt into a thin case of charred timbers, and that all three hatches in her, together with the skylight, lay open and yawning like the mouths of wells to the first rush of sea that should tumble over the side.

I will not feign to remember how that night passed. The tall wax candle burnt bravely and lasted long; but the guttering of it to the circlings of the air in the extremity of the cabin obliged me to light another before the night was spent. It a little encouraged Miss Temple to be able to see. God knows how it might have been with her had we been obliged to sit in that blackness. Once the candle was blown out, and when I had succeeded in lighting it afresh, after a few minutes of groping and hunting and manœuvring with my tinder-box, I looked at the girl, and knew by the horror that shone in her eyes, and the marble hardness in the aspect of her parted lips, as though her mouth were some carved expression of fear, how heart-subduing had that short spell of blackness proved. From time to time she would ask for a little wine, which she sipped as though thirsty, but she swallowed a few drops only, as if she feared that the wine, by heating her, would increase her thirst; yet when I spoke of going below to seek for some fresh water, she begged me not to leave her.

'It is the memory of the body that sat at this table which makes loneliness insupportable to me, Mr. Dugdale,' she exclaimed. 'I seemed to see the dreadful object when the candle went out. I thought I had more spirit. I am but a very weak woman, after all.'

'I do not think so,' said I; 'you are bearing this frightful trial very nobly. How would it be with some girls I know? They would be swooning away; they would be exhausting themselves in cries; they would be tearing themselves to pieces in hysterics. And how is it with me? Sometimes I am frightened to death, but not with fears of darkness or of the dead. I am certain we shall be rescued; this hull is making excellent weather of it; there is food and drink below, yet I am filled with consternation and grief. Why should it be otherwise? We are creatures of nerves, and this is an experience to test the courage of a saint.'

Well, we would exchange a few sentences after this pattern, and then fall silent for a whole hour at a time. She never closed her eyes throughout the night. Whenever I glanced at her, I met her gaze brilliant with emotion. The change was so sudden that I found it impossible to fully realise it. When I thought of Miss Temple aboard the *Countess Ida*, her haughtiness, her character of almost insolent reserve, how she had hardly found it in her to address me with an accent of courtesy, her ungracious treatment of me after the service I had done her in rescuing her from a

perilous situation: I say when I recalled all this and a deal more, and then viewed her as she sat opposite, crouching in a corner, supporting herself by grasping the table with her heavily ringed fingers, the high-born delicate beauty of her lineaments showing like some cameo in ivory, and reflected that she and I were absolutely alone, that it might come to her owing her life to me, or that we might be doomed to miserably perish together—this girl, this unapproachable young lady, at whom I had been wont to stare furtively with fascinated eyes on board the Indiaman for long spells at a stretch—I could not bring my mind to credit the reality of our situation.

CHAPTER XX

I SEARCH THE WRECK

All night long it blew a strong wind, but shortly before daybreak it fined down on a sudden into a light air out of the south-west, leaving a troubled rolling sea behind it. It was still very thick all round the horizon, so that from the door of the deck-house my gaze scarcely penetrated a distance of two miles. It was no longer fog, however, but cloud, sullen, low-lying, here and there shaping out; a familiar tropical dawn in the parallels, though it made one think, too, of the smothers you fall in with on the edge of the Gulf Stream.

I stepped on deck to wait for the light to break, and Miss Temple came to the door to look also. The hull still rolled violently, but without the dangerous friskiness of the jumps, recoils, and staggering recoveries of the night when there was a sharp sea running as well as a long heaving swell. My heart was in my gaze as the dim faintness came sifting into the darkness of the east. In a few minutes it was a grey morn, the sea an ugly lead, and the horizon all round of the aspect of a drizzling November day in the English Channel. We both swept the water with our sight, again and again looking, straining our vision into the dim distances; but to no purpose.

'Do you see anything?' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'No,' I answered, 'there is nothing in sight.'

'Oh, my heart will break!' she cried.

'We must wait awhile,' said I; 'this sort of weather has a trick of clearing rapidly, and it may be all bright sky and wide shining surface of ocean long before noon; then we shall see the ships, and they will see us. But this is a low level. Something may heave into view from the height of that mast. I shall not be long gone. Be careful to hold on firmly, Miss Temple; nay, oblige me by sitting in the deck-house. Should you relax your grasp, a sudden roll may carry you overboard.'

In silence, and with a face of despair, she took her seat on a

locker, and very warily I made my way forwards. We had taken but a brief view of the hull when we boarded her, and the appearance of her towards the bows was new to me. There were twenty signs of her having been swept again and again by the seas. No doubt, her hatches had been uncovered that her people might rummage her before going away in her boats; and the covers, for all I could tell, might have been rolled overboard by some of her violent workings. Yet it was certain that she must have been swept when her hatches were covered, or the lieutenant would not have found her with a dry hold. But I had been long enough at sea to know that it is the improbable conjecture that oftenest fits the fact of a marine disaster.

I took a view of the foremast, to make sure that all was sound with it, and then sprang into the shrouds and gained the top. Some few feet of the splintered topmast still stood, and under the platform at which I had arrived the fore-yard swang drearily to its overhauled braces hanging in bights. There was no more to see here than from the deck. The thick atmosphere receded nothing to this elevation, and would have been as impenetrable had I climbed a thousand feet. It was like being in the heart of an amphitheatre of sulky shadows. The water rolled foamless, and there was little more air to be felt than was made by the sickeningly monotonous swing of the solitary spar from whose summit I explored the ocean limits in all directions, frowning to the heart-breaking intensity of my stare. By heaven, then, thought I, we *are* alone! and if we are to be picked up by either of the ships, it will not be to-day nor maybe to-morrow!

I glanced down at the deck of the hull, and observed that the sides of the fore-hatch were black with extinguished fire. The headrail was gone to port, and from the eyes of her to the deck-house aft the fabric had a fearfully wrecked look, with its mutilated bulwark stanchions, its yawning hatchways, its dislocated capstan, and other details of a like kind, all helping to a horrible wildness of appearance to one who viewed, as I did, from an eminence, the crazy, fire-blackened, dismasted old basket, that wallowed as though every head of swell that rolled at her must overwhelm and drown her hollow interior.

I again sent my eyes in another passionate search, and then descended. As I sprang from the shrouds on to the deck, my eye was taken by the brig's bell, that dangled from a frame close against the foremast. Dreading lest some increase in the swell should start it off into ringing in some dismal hour of gloom and heighten Miss Temple's misery and terror, I unhooked the tongue of it, and threw it down, and rejoined my companion, whose white face put the piteous question of her heart to me in silence.

'No,' said I, swaying in front of her as I held on to the door; 'there is nothing to be seen.'

'Oh it is hard! it is hard!' she cried. 'If one could only recall a few hours—be able to go back to yesterday! I do not fear

death ; but to die thus—to drown in that dreadful sea—no one to be able to tell how I perished !' She sobbed, but with dry eyes.

There was no reasoning with such a fit of despair as this, nor was it possible for me to say anything out of which she might extract a grain of comfort, seeing that I could but speak conjecturally, and with no other perception than was to be shaped by the faint light of my own hopes. My heart was deeply moved by her misery. Her beauty showed wan, and was inexpressibly appealing with its air of misery. The effects of the long and fearful vigils of the night that was gone were cruelly visible in her. There was a violet shadow under her eyes, her lips were pale, her lids drooped, her hair hung in some little disorder about her brow and ears ; her very dress seemed significant of shipwreck, mocking the eye with what the grim usage of the sea had already transformed into mere ironical finery. Yet there was too much of the nature she had familiarised me to on board the Indiaman still expressed in the natural haughty set of her lips, even charged as they were with the anguish that worked in her, to win me to any attempt of tender reassurance. I watched her dumbly, though my soul was melted into pity. Presently she looked at me.

'I suppose there is nothing to be done, Mr. Dugdale ?'

'Indeed, then,' said I, 'there is a deal to be done. First of all, you must cheer up your heart, which you will find easy if you can credit me when I tell you that this hull is perfectly buoyant ; that, though the weather is thick and gloomy, the sun, as he gains power, is certain to open out the ocean to us ; that there are two ships close at hand searching for us ; that there are provisions enough below to enable us to support life for days and perhaps weeks ; and that, even if the Indiaman or the corvette fail to fall in with us, we are sure to be sighted by one of the numerous vessels which are daily traversing this great ocean highway. What, then, are we to do but compose our minds, exert our patience, keep a bright lookout, be provided with means for signalling our distress, and meanwhile not to suffer our unfortunate condition to starve us ? And that reminds me to overhaul the pantry for something better than biscuit to break our fast with.

A softness I should have thought impossible to the spirited fires of her eyes when all was well with her entered her gaze for a moment as it rested upon me, and a faint smile flickered upon and vanished off her lips ; but she did not speak, and I dropped through the hatch to ascertain if the pantry could yield us something more nourishing than ship's bread.

The sullenness of the day without lay in gloom below. I was forced to return for a candle, with which I entered the little cabin that I had visited on the previous day ; but when I came to make a search I could find nothing more to eat than cheese, biscuit, and marmalade. There was a number of raw hams, but the galley was gone, and there was no means to cook them. There were two casks of flour, a sack of some kind of dried beans, and

a small barrel of moist sugar. These matters had probably been overlooked when the crew hurriedly removed themselves from the brig. No doubt, at the time of jettisoning such commodities as the hold might have stored, they had broken out as much food and water as they could take with them. There was more than a bottle of wine in the deck-house; down here, stowed away in straw and secured by a batten, were some three or four scores of full bottles, all, I supposed, holding the same generous liquor contained in the first of them we had tasted. But there was no fresh water. I sought with diligence, but to no purpose. Possibly the people might have left some casks of it in the hold; but that was a search I would not at present undertake.

I took some cheese and marmalade and another handful of biscuits, along with a knife and a couple of tin dishes. As I passed through the cabin, the light of the candle I held glanced upon a stand of small-arms fixed just abaft the short flight of the hatch-ladder. There were some thirty to forty muskets of an old-fashioned make, even for those days, and on either hand of them, swinging in tiers or rows from nails or hooks in the bulkhead, were a quantity of cutlasses, half-pikes, tomahawks, and other items of the grim machinery of murder. I placed the food upon the deck-house table.

'A shabby repast, Miss Temple,' said I, 'but we may easily support life on such fare until we are rescued.'

She ate some biscuit and marmalade, and drank a little wine: but she incessantly sent her gaze through the windows or the open door, and sighed frequently in tremulous respirations, and sometimes there would enter a singular look of bewilderment into the expression of her eyes, as though her mind at such moments failed her, and did but imperfectly understand our situation. I would then fear that the horror which possessed her might end in breaking down her spirits, and even dement her, indeed. Already her eyes were languid with grief and want of rest, and such strength and life as they still possessed seemed weakened yet by the shadowing of the long fringes. I endeavoured to win her away from her thoughts by talking to her.

I possessed a pocket-book, which supplied me with pencil and paper, and I drew a diagram of the two ships' and the wreck's position, as I was best able to conceive it, and made arrows to figure the direction of the wind, and marked distances in figures, and enlarged freely and heartily upon our prospects, pointing with my pencil to the paper whilst I talked. This interested her. She came round to the locker on which I sat, and placed herself beside me, and leaned her face near to mine, supporting her head by her elbow whilst she gazed with eyes riveted to the paper, listening thirstily. I had never had her so close to me before saving that day when we swung together on to the hencoop, but then it was a constrained situation, and she had let me suspect that it was very distasteful to her. It was far otherwise now. She was near

me of her own will; I felt her warm breath on my cheek; the subtle fragrance of her presence was in the air I respired. I talked eagerly to conceal the emotions she excited, and I felt the blood hot in my face when I had made an end with my diagram, and drew a little away to restore the book to my pocket.

She now seemed able and willing to converse, but she did not offer to leave my side.

'Suppose the ships are unable to find us, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Some other vessel is certain to fall in with us.'

'But she may be bound to a part of the world very remote from India or England.'

'True,' said I; 'but as she jogs along she may encounter a vessel proceeding to England, into which we shall be easily able to tranship ourselves.'

'How tedious! We may have to wander for months about the ocean!'

'It is always step by step, Miss Temple, in this life. Let us begin at the beginning, and quit this wreck, at any rate.'

'All my luggage is in the Indiaman. How I am to manage I cannot conceive,' said she, running her eyes over her dress, and lifting her hand to her hat.

'Pray let no such consideration as dress trouble you. The experience will gain in romance from our necessities, and we shall be able to read "Robinson Crusoe" with new enjoyment.'

She faintly smiled, with just a hint of peevishness in the curl of her lip.

'If this be romance, Mr. Dugdale, may my days henceforth, if God be merciful enough to preserve us, be steeped in the dullest prose.'

'I wonder where Colledge and the cutter's crew are?' said I.

'I do not think,' she exclaimed, 'if Mr. Colledge were in your place he would show your spirit.'

'He was a great favourite of yours, Miss Temple.'

'Not great. I rather liked him. I knew some of his connections. He was an amiable person. I did not know that he was engaged to be married.'

I was astonished that she should have said this, but I was eager to encourage her to talk, and in our state of misery it would signify but little what topic we lighted upon.

'Did he inform you he was engaged?' said I.

'No. I perceived it in his looks when his cousin asked him the question. Did he ever tell you who the young lady was?' she added listlessly, and though she spoke of the thing it was easy to see that she was without interest in it.

I could not tell a lie, and silence would have been injurious to my wishes for her. Besides, she had guessed the truth by no help from me, and then, again, our situation rendered the subject exquisitely trifling and insignificant.

'Yes,' I replied; 'we were cabin-fellows, and intimate. He

showed me the girl's portrait—a plump, pretty little woman. Her name is Fanny Crawley, daughter of one of the numberless Sir Johns or Sir Thomases of this age.'

She was looking through the cabin-door at the sea, and scarcely seemed to hear or to heed me. Am I strictly honourable in this? thought I. Pshaw! it was no moment to consider the rights and wrongs of such a thing. Her discovery had freed me from all obligation of secrecy, and what I had supplied she would have easily been able to ascertain for herself on her return home, if, indeed, home was ever to be viewed again by either of us.

'What horrible weather!' she exclaimed, bringing her eyes to my face; 'there is no wind, and the sea rolls like liquid lead. When you were at sea, were you ever in a situation of danger such as this?'

'This is an uneasy time,' said I; 'but do not call it a situation of danger yet. I am going shortly to overhaul the wreck. I must keep her afloat until we are taken off her.'

'How long were you at sea, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Two years.'

'Is your father a sailor?'

'No; my father is dead. He was captain in the 38th Regiment of Foot, and was killed at Burmah.'

There was a kind of dawning of interest in her eyes, an expression I had not noticed when she talked of Colledge and his engagement.

'My father was in the army too,' said she; 'but he saw very little service. Is your mother living?'

'She is.'

She sighed bitterly, and hid her face whilst she exclaimed:

'Oh, my poor mother! my poor mother! How little she knows! And she was so reluctant to let me leave her.' She sighed again deeply, and let her hands fall, and then sank into silence.

I quitted the deck-house to take another look round. Just then rain began to fall, and the sea became shrouded with the discharge. So oil-smooth now was the swell that each drop as it fell pitted the lead-coloured rounds with a black point, and the water alongside looked to be spotted with ink. As I had met with no fresh water in the little room that I call the pantry, and as there might be none in the hold, or none that with my single pair of hands I should be able to come at, I resolved to take advantage of the wet that was pouring down, and dived into the cabin to search for any vessel that would catch and hold it. The flour and sugar casks in the pantry would not do. I peered into the other berths, but could see nothing to answer the purpose. It was of the first consequence, however, to us that we should possess a store of drinking water to mix with our wine, for we were in the tropics; the atmosphere was heavy with heat, even under a shrouded heaven; it was easy to figure what the temperature would rise to when the sun should

shine forth; and the mere fancy of days of stagnation and of vertical suns, of this hull roasting under the central broiling eye, of the breathless sea, stretching in feverish breathings into the dim, blue distance, unbroken by any tip of sail, and no fresh water to drink, was horribly oppressive, and rendered me half crazy to find some contrivance to catch the rain, which might at any moment cease. The thought of the lockers in the deck-house occurred to me. I mounted the ladder and searched them, and to my unspeakable joy, found in the locker upon which Miss Temple had been seated during the night, four canvas buckets, apparently brand new, as I might judge, from the cloth and from the rope handles. The rain fell heavily, and the water gushed in streams from the roof of the deck-house at many points of it. In a very short time the buckets were filled, but they were of a permeable substance, and it was necessary to decant them as soon as possible. There was no difficulty in doing this, for there were several empty bottles in the shelves below along with a couple of large jars, some tin pannikins, and so forth. These I brought up, washed them in the rain, and then filled them, and in this manner contrived to store away a good number of gallons, not to mention the contents of the buckets, which I left hanging outside to fill up afresh, meaning to use them first, and taking my chance of loss through the water soaking through them.

All this, that is to be described in a few lines of writing, signified a lengthy occupation, that broke well into the day. Miss Temple watched my labours with interest, and begged to be of service; but she could be of little use to me, nor would I suffer her to expose herself to the wet.

'Will not this rain fill the hull,' she exclaimed, 'and sink her?'

'It would need to keep on raining for a long while to do that,' said I, laughing. 'I am going below to inspect the forepart of her, and to ascertain, if possible, what her hold contains. Will you accompany me? The hull rolls steadily; you will not find walking inconvenient, and it is very necessary that you should occupy your mind.'

'I should like to do so,' she answered; 'but ought not one of us to stay here in case the sea should clear and show us the ships?'

'Alas!' said I, 'there is no wind, and the ships probably lie as motionless as we. This weather will not speedily clear, I believe. We shall not be long below, and any sort of exertion is better than sitting here in loneliness and musing upon the inevitable, and adding the misery of thought to the distress of our situation.'

'Yes, you are right,' she exclaimed, rising. 'You give me some heart, Mr. Dugdale, yet I do not know why. There is nothing that you can say to encourage me to hope.'

To this I made no reply, but took her hand, and assisted her to descend the ladder. She came to a stand at the foot of it, as though terrified by the gloom.

'It is dreadful,' she exclaimed in a low voice, 'to think that only a few short hours ago the poor lieutenant whose heart was beating high with thoughts of returning home, should have been laughing and joking—here! I can hear his voice still; I can hear Mr. Colledge's laughter. Hark! What noises are those?'

'Rats!' I exclaimed.

The squeaking was shrill and fierce and close to. I lighted a candle, she meanwhile coming to my side, her elbow rubbing mine, as though she would have my hand within an instant's reach of her own. The squeaking continued. It sounded as though there were some score of rats worrying something, or fighting among themselves.

'Hold this candle for a moment,' said I, and I advanced to the bulkhead and grasped a cutlass, and then peeped into the little passage that divided the after cabins. The rats were somewhere along it, but it was too dark to see; so, laying the cutlass aside, I took down a musket and sent the heavy weapon javelin-fashion sheer into the thick of the hideous noise. A huge rat as big as a kitten rushed over my feet; Miss Temple uttered a shriek, and let fall the candle.

'Do not be alarmed!' I shouted; 'the beasts know their way below;' and seeing the pallid outline of the candle upon the deck I picked it up and relighted it.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' she cried, in a voice that trembled with disgust and fear, 'what am I to do? I dare not be here, and I dare not be above alone. What is more shocking and terrifying than a rat?'

I told her that rats were much more afraid of us than we could possibly be of them; but, commiserating her alarm, I offered to escort her to the deck-house.

'But you will not leave me there,' she exclaimed.

'It is very necessary,' said I, 'that I should examine the state of the hull.'

'Then I will stay with you,' said she. 'I cannot endure to be alone.'

She gathered up her dress, holding the folds of it with one hand, whilst she passed the other through my arm. I could feel her shuddering as she clung to me. Her eyes were large with fright and aversion, and they sparkled to the candle-flame as she rolled them over the deck. At the extremity of the passage that separated the foremost berths from the pantry stood what I believed a bulkhead; but on bringing the candle to it I discovered that it was a door of very heavy scantling that slided in grooves with a stout iron handle for pulling it by. It travelled very easily, as something that had been repeatedly used. The moment it was opened there was plenty of daylight, for the open square of the main hatch yawned close by overhead, of dimensions considerable enough to illuminate every part of this interior. I stood viewing with wonder a scene of extraordinary confusion. There were no

hammocks, but all about the decks, in higgledy-piggledy heaps and clusters, were mats of some sort of West Indian reeds, rugs and blankets, bolster-shaped bags, a few sea-chests, most of them capsized, with their lids open, and a surprising intermixture of hook-pots, tin-dishes, sea-boots, oilskins, empty broken cases, staves of casks, tackles, and a raffle of gear and other things of which my mind does not preserve the recollection. Several large rats, on my swinging the door along its grooves, darted from out of the various heaps, and shot with incredible velocity down through the large hatch that conducted into the hold, and that lay on a line with the hatch above.

'By all that's—— Well, well! here's been excitement surely,' said I. 'Was ever panical terror more incomparably suggested? But this brig was full of men, and there was manifestly a tremendous scramble at the last. Would not anyone think that there had been a fierce fight down here?'

'Do you think there are any dead bodies under those things?' exclaimed Miss Temple in a hollow whisper.

'See!' cried I; 'lest there should be more rats about, suppose I contrive some advantage for you over the beasts;' and so saying I dragged one of the largest of the sea-chests to the bulkhead and helped her to get upon it.

This seemed to make her easier. Filled as my mind was with conflicting emotions excited by the extraordinary scene of hurry and disorder which I surveyed, I could yet find leisure to glance at and deeply admire her fine, commanding figure, as she stood with inimitable, unconscious grace, swaying upon the chest to the regular rolling of the hull. It was a picture of a sort to live as long as the memory lasted. There she stood, draped in the elegancies of her white apparel, her full, dark eyes large and vital again in the shadow of her rich hat, under which her face showed colourless and faultless in lineament as some incomparable achievement of the sculptor's art: her beauty and dignity heightened in a manner not to be expressed or explained by the character of the scene round about—the uncovered square of hatch through which the rain was falling, the wild disorder of the deck, the rude beams and coarse sides of the interior.

I approached the edge of the hatchway and looked down. Little more was to be seen than ballast, on the top of which lay a couple of dismounted guns, apparently twelve-pounders. A short distance forward in the gloom were the outlines of some casks and cases. The hull was dry, as the lieutenant had said. Water there undoubtedly must have been, washing to and fro under the ballast and down in the run, but too inconsiderable in quantity to give me the least uneasiness. One glance below sufficed to assure me that the fabric of the wreck was tight.

I considered a little whether it might not be possible to so protect the yawning hatches as to provide against any violent inroads of water should this dirty shadow of weather that overhung the

wreck in wet end in wind; but there were no tarpaulins to be seen, no spare planks or anything of a like kind which could be converted into a cover, nothing but mats and rugs, which were not to be put to any sort of use in the direction I had in my mind.

I left Miss Temple standing on the chest, darting alarmed glances at the huddled heaps which littered the decks, and walked forward to a doorway in a stout partition that bulk-headed off a short space of forecastle from these 'tweendecks. There was an open forescuttle here that made plenty of light. This was the interior that had been burnt out, as the lieutenant had told me, to the condition of a charred shell. The deck and sides were as black as a hat, and the place showed as if it had been constructed of charcoal. A strong smell as of fire still lingered. Whatever had been here in the shape of sea-furniture was burnt, or removed by the people. I picked up a small handspike, and entering the cindery apartment, beat here and there against the semi-calcined planks, almost expecting to find the handspike shoot through; but black as the timber looked it yielded a hearty echo of my thumps, and I returned to Miss Temple satisfied that the hull was still very staunch, and, but for her uncovered hatches, as seaworthy as ever she had been at any time since her launch.

Whilst turning over some of the mats and wearing apparel on the deck with my foot I spied a large cube of something yellow, and, picking it up and examining it, I was very happy to discover that it was tobacco. I made more of this than had I found a purse of a hundred guineas, for, though I had my pipe in my pocket, I was without anything to smoke, and I cannot express how hungrily during the night I had yearned for the exceeding solace of a few whiffs, and with what melancholy I had viewed the prospect of having to wait until we were rescued before I should obtain a cigar or a pipe of tobacco.

'What have you there, Mr. Dugdale?' cried Miss Temple.

'A little matter that, coming on top of the discovery that this hull is as good as a cork under our feet, helps very greatly towards re-establishing my peace of mind—a lump of very beautiful tobacco,' and I smelt it fondly again.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale, I thought it was a dead rat,' she exclaimed. 'What are all those mats?'

'The privateersmen used them to sleep on, I expect. The quantity of them tells us how heavily manned this old waggon went.'

'There is no wind, Mr. Dugdale. The rain falls in perfectly straight lines. Let us return to the deck-house.'

I took her hand and helped her to dismount. She gathered her dress about her as before, and passed with trepidation through the darksome cabin, holding tightly by my arm, and then, with a wearied despairful air, seated herself upon a locker and leaned her chin in her hand, biting her under-lip whilst she gazed vacantly through the little window at the sullen raining gloom of the sky.

CHAPTER XXI

WE SIGHT A SAIL

I SHOULD but tease you by attempting to narrate the passage of the hours from this point. All day long it rained; no air stirred, and the leaden sea flattened into sulky heavings wide apart, on which the hull rolled quietly. Possessing but the clothes in which I stood, I fetched an oilskin from the 'tweendecks to save me from a wet skin, and thus attired made several journeys into the foretop, where I lingered, straining my gaze all around into the shrouded horizon till my eyeballs seemed to crack to the stretching of my vision. Sometimes, when in the deck-house, I would start to my feet on fancying I heard a sound of oars, but it was never more than some sobbing wash of swell, or some stir of the rudder swayed on its pintles by the movement of the fabric. There was plenty of stuff below with which to produce smoke, but no preparation for such a signal could be made whilst it rained, nor could any purpose be served by having the materials ready until the weather cleared, and wind blew, and something hove into sight.

Miss Temple's miserable dejection grieved me bitterly. The horror of our situation seemed to increase upon her, and say what I might I never succeeded in coaxing the least air of spirit into her face. It was distressing beyond language to see this haughty, beautiful, high-born woman, accustomed to every refinement and elegance that was to be purchased or contrived, reduced to such a pass as this: languidly putting her lips to the rough pannikin in which I would hand her a draught of wine and water; scarcely able to bite the flinty biscuit which, with marmalade and cheese, formed our repasts; sitting for weary long spells at a time motionless in a corner of the rough structure, her eyelids heavy, her gaze fixed and listless, her lips parted, with all their old haughty expression of imperious resolution gone from them, her fingers locked upon her lap, her breast now and again rising and falling with hysteric swiftness to some wrenching emotion which yet found her face marble-like, and her eyes without their familiar impassioned glow.

I recollect wondering once, whilst watching her silently, whether there would prove anything in this experience to change her character. Should the Indiaman recover us, there might be a full fourteen or even sixteen weeks of association before us yet. Once safely aboard the *Countess Ida*, would she let this experience slip out of her mind as an influence, and repeat in her manner towards myself the cold indifference, the haughty neglect, the distant supercilious usage which I had found so objectionable, that I was coming very near to as cordially hating her character as I deeply admired the beauties and perfections of her face and person. Was she not a sort of woman to accept an obligation and to look,

if it suited her to do so, very coldly afterwards upon the person who had obliged her? Ridiculous as the emotion was at such a time, when, for all I knew, in a few hours the pair of us might be floating a brace of corpses, fathoms deep in that leaden ocean over the side, yet I must confess to a small stir of exultation to the thought that supposing us to be rescued, let her behave as she pleased, she never could escape the memory of having been alone with me in this horrible hull, nor avert the discovery of this circumstance by her relatives and friends. It was a consideration, indeed, to bring her mightily closer to me than ever she had dreamt of, and to my mind it was as complete a turning of the tables as the most romantic fancy could have invented—that she who could scarce address me on board the Indiaman for pride, and for dislike too, for all I could tell, should now be in the intimate and lonely association of shipwreck with me, clinging to me, entreating me not to leave her side; dependent upon such spirit and energy as I possessed for the food and drink that was to support us, and again and again talking to me with a freedom which she would have exhibited to no living creature in the Indiaman, her aunt excepted.

When that second night came down black as thunder, raining hard, the ocean breathless, I entreated her to rest.

'You must sleep, Miss Temple,' said I; 'I will keep watch.'

She shook her head.

'Nay,' I continued, 'you will rest comfortably upon this locker. You need but a pillow. There is nothing in the cabins to be thought of for that purpose; but I believe I can contrive a soft bolster for you out of my coat.'

'You are very kind, but I shall not be able to sleep.'

I continued to entreat her, and I saw she was affected by my earnestness.

'Since it will please you if I lie down, Mr. Dugdale, I will do so,' said she.

I whipped off my coat and rolled it up, and she removed her hat with a manner that made me see she abhorred even this trifling disturbance of her apparel, as though it signified a sort of settling down to the unspeakable life of the wreck. The fabric swayed so tenderly that the bottle containing the candle stood without risk of capsizal upon the table, and the small but steady flame shone clearly upon her. How delicate were her features by that light; how rich and beautiful the exceeding abundance of the dark coils of her hair, the richer and the more beautiful for the neglect in it, for the shadowing of her white brow by the disordered tresses, for the drooping of it about her ears, with the sparkle of diamonds there! Presently she was resting.

I removed the candle to the stanchion, and secured the bottle where the light would be off her eyes, and sat me down near the doorway as far from her as the narrow breadth of the structure would permit, where I filled a pipe and smoked, expelling the

fumes into the air, and listening with a heavy heart to the faint sounds breaking from the interior of the hull to the washing moan at long intervals of some passing heave of swell, and to the squeaking of the rats in the cabin below—a most dismal and shocking sound, I do protest, to hearken to amidst the hush and blackness of that ocean night, scarce vexed by more than the pattering of the rain.

From time to time Miss Temple would address me; then she fell silent, and by-and-by, looking towards her, and observing her to lie motionless, I softly crept to abreast of her, keeping the table between, and found her sleeping.

It was then something after ten by my watch, and she slept for five hours without a stir, though now and again she spoke in her sleep. I know not why I should have remained awake unless it was to keep my weather-eye lifting for the rats. There was nothing to watch for or to hope for in such weather as that. Once, when the beasts below were very noisy—for, as you will suppose, in that solemn stillness their squeakings rose with a singularly sharp edge to the ear—I bethought me of the pantry, and could not remember whether I had shut the door. For all I could yet tell, the stores we had to depend upon were in that little cabin, and if the rats found their way to the food, we might speedily starve. I lighted a second candle, that, should the girl suddenly awake, she might not find herself in the dark, and stepped below, and found the door closed. I opened it, and minutely surveyed the interior, and observing all to be well, shut the door and came away; but never can I forget the uncontrollable chills and shudders which seized me on passing through that cabin! I do not doubt my mind had been a little weakened. The remains of the mainmast pierced the deck, and stood like a pillar; it stirred to the movement of the candle in my hand, and I stopped with a violent start to gaze at it while the perspiration broke from my forehead. Vague indeterminable shapes seemed to flit past and about the stand of arms. The dull noises in the hold took to my alarmed ear the notes of human groans. Several rats scurried in flying forms of blackness towards the after cabins: they seemed to start up through the deck at my feet!

When I resumed my seat on the locker, I was trembling from head to foot, and my heart beat with feverish rapidity. A draught of wine rallied me, and I tried to find something ridiculous in my fears. But all the same my dejection was as that of a man under sentence of death, and again and again I would put up a prayer to God for our speedy deliverance, whilst I sat hearkening to the noises below, to the steady pattering of the rain, to the occasional melancholy sob of water, and to the broken, unintelligible mutterings of the sleeping girl.

At some hour between three and four my companion awoke. She sat up with a cry of wonder, and by the candle-light I observed her staring around, with looks of astonishment and horror

such as might appear in the face of a person who starts from some pleasant dream into the realities of a dreadful situation. I waited until she should have recollected herself, to use the fine expressive word of the old writers.

'I have been dreaming of home,' she said, in a low voice, 'of safety, of comfort, of everything that I am now wanting. What time is it, Mr. Dugdale?'

I put my watch close to my face and told her the hour.

'How black the night continues!' she said—'how silent, too!' she added, after hearkening awhile. 'It has ceased to rain, and there is not a breath of air.'

'It has not rained for these two hours past,' said I. 'I am impatient for the day to break. The horizon should be tolerably clear, if there be no rain; yet what can daybreak possibly disclose to us on top of such a night of stagnation as this has been?'

'Have you slept?'

'No.'

'Then you will take some rest now. It is my turn to watch.'

'The dawn will be breaking in a couple of hours,' said I; 'I will wait till it comes to take a look. Should nothing be in sight, I will endeavour to rest. You will not suffer in the daylight from the feeling of loneliness that would make you wretched now if I slept.'

'Whilst you are here, although sleeping, Mr. Dugdale, I should not feel lonely. Your voice assures me that you need sleep. I have been resting five hours. How patient you are!'

She took up my jacket, reformed it pillow-fashion, placed it on the locker where her own head had lain, and moved to make room for me, seating herself where my feet would about come.

'Pray lie down, Mr. Dugdale. I shall be closer to you here than you have been to me, and I can awaken you in an instant if there should be occasion to do so.'

I complied, rather to please her than to humour my own wishes; for though my eyelids had the heaviness of lead, there was a thrilling and hurrying of nervous sensation in me which were as good as a threat that I should not sleep. And so it proved, for after I had held my head pillowed for some half-hour, I was still broad awake; and then growing impatient of my posture, I sat erect.

'No use, Miss Temple, I cannot sleep; and since that is so, pray resume this hard couch and finish out your slumbers.'

But this she would not do, protesting that she was fully rested. I was too desirous of her company to weary her with entreaties, and until the day broke we sat at that narrow table with the light close enough to enable us to see each other clearly. I remember saying to her:

'Since this is an experience you were fated to pass through—I suppose we must all believe in the pre-ordination of our lives—my sincere regret is that you should not have been imprisoned in this hull with somebody more agreeable to yourself than I.'

'Why do you say that?' she exclaimed, giving me a look that carried me back. 'In this state of misery a compliment would be shocking.'

'I seek no compliment,' said I. 'I am merely expressing a regret.'

'You regret that you are here?' she exclaimed. 'So do I, for then I should not be here. But since it is my lot to be here, I am satisfied with my companion; I would not exchange him for any other person on board the *Countess Ida*.'

I bowed.

'Should we be rescued,' she continued, keeping her dark gaze full upon me as she spoke (and something of their beauty and brilliancy of light had returned to her eyes with her rest), 'I shall be deeply in your debt. My mother will thank you, Mr. Dugdale.'

'I have done nothing, Miss Temple. It is you who are now complimentary, and I fear ironical.'

She slightly shook her head and sighed, then remained silent for a minute or two, and said: 'How small and contemptible my spirit shows itself when I am tested! Do you recollect when this wretched brig was lying near us, how I took a parasol from my aunt and levelled it at this vessel and talked of wishing to see a sea-fight and of shooting a man? How brave I was when there was nothing particularly to be afraid of, and how cowardly I have shown myself here.'

'I should have scarcely believed,' said I, 'that you were sensible of my presence at the time you speak of.'

'Why?' she asked.

'Indeed,' I continued, 'I should have scarcely believed that you were sensible that I was on board the ship.'

'Mr. Dugdale, if my manner did not please you, this is no time to reproach me with it.' Her eyes sparkled and her lip curled peevishly.

'Hark!' I exclaimed; 'I hear a rippling noise as of approaching wind.' I passed round the table, gained the door, and looked out. The atmosphere was still motionless, but the sounds of rippling drew near, and presently I felt a pleasant little air blowing over the stern of the hull, accompanied with the tinkling and lipping noises of water set in motion trembling to the brig's side. But it was still pitch dark, and search the sky where I would, I could observe no break of faintness, no leanest vision of star, no vaguest outline of cloud in the impenetrable obscurity.

I returned to the table, this time seating myself opposite to Miss Temple. It was easily seen in her face that she was sensible I did this consciously. Indeed, the gaze she rested upon me was a look of inquiry as though she would discover whether this holding aloof on my part was due to respect or to dislike. Then, as though she suddenly sickened to such idle considerations, she exclaimed with an eager awakening of her in her whole manner. 'Does this

breeze come from the direction where the ships are, or where you may suppose them to be, Mr. Dugdale?'

'For the life of me I could not tell you,' I responded; 'there are no quarters of the compass for human senses on such a night as this, in a hull that may be headed on all sorts of courses by the set of the swell; but the dawn will be here anon, and if this draught hold, we shall be able to find out whence it proceeds.'

It was still blowing the same light breeze when day broke, and I then knew that the wind sat about north-west. Miss Temple and I stepped on to the deck, where we stood in an agony of impatience awaiting the full revelation of the sea. One saw why it should have been so pitch dark throughout the night; the sky was overcast from horizon to horizon by a sheet of sallowish leaden-hued vapour. Yet the atmosphere had cleared so as to enable the sight to penetrate to the verge of the normal sea-line, where the ocean stood in a firm rim of the darkness of indigo in the east against the grey of the morning that was spreading out behind it. I took a long and steady view of the circle; my companion's eyes were riveted upon me as I did so; she had rather trust my sight than hers, and her gaze glowed with an inexpressible eagerness to witness in my face an expression that should inform her I beheld a sail.

'It is the same inhuman abominable blankness as that of yesterday,' said I, fetching a deep breath of rage and grief; then shocked by the air of horror and despair in Miss Temple, I added: 'Yet this gives us a view of but little more than seven miles. Here is an air, surely, to whip something along. The ships of this ocean cannot all have rotted in yesterday's pestilential calm. Oh for such another telescope as Mr. Prance's!' and so saying I trudged forwards, and in a few minutes was sweeping the horizon from the elevation of the fore-top.

I ran my eyes slowly and piercingly along the sea-line, starting from the part into which the vessel's mutilated bowsprit pointed, and when my vision was over the starboard quarter, I beheld trembling upon the utmost verge of the livid waters stretching to the shrouded sky a minute fragment of white—a tip as of a seagull's pinion, but of a certainty a sail! I lingered to make sure. Miss Temple watched me from abaft the deck-house. My glance went to her for an instant, and I saw her bring her hands together and lift them, as though she witnessed in my posture that I descried something. My heart hammered violently in my ears, and my breathing was short and laboured.

'What do you see?' Miss Temple cried at last, her rich voice, tremulous with excitement and expectation, floating up like the notes of a flute.

'A sail!' I exclaimed, calling with an effort. 'Patience! I must stay here to make sure of the direction she is taking,' and I stood for a minute pointing while she strained her sight; but there was nothing for her to see down there.

The breeze had weight enough to determine the matter with

some despatch, and I knew that if the sail were heading away from us, it must speedily vanish, so mere a speck was it that showed. Instead, though I will not say that it *grew* whilst I stood staring, it hung with a fixedness to satisfy me that the vessel was steering a course that must bring us into the sphere of her horizon; and not having the least doubt of this, I dropped over the short futlock shrouds of the wreck and sprang on to the deck.

'It is a ship, Mr. Dugdale!' cried Miss Temple with something of an hysteric accent of inquiry in her voice.

'Assuredly,' I answered.

'Will she see us, do you think?'

'Ay, if she does not shift her helm. But we will *compel* her to see us.'

The girl suddenly grasped my hand in both hers, bowed her head over it, and I felt a tear. I was so affected that I stood looking, unable to speak. It was a sort of submission in its way. I cannot convey my thoughts of it. She was without her hat; I see her now as she bent over my hand; I feel the ice-cold pressure of her fingers, and recall the tears glittering through the beauty of her downcast lashes as they rose. She slowly lifted her large wet eyes to my face.

'What an experience this has been!' she whispered; 'how shall I be able to persuade people that I underwent it and lived?'

She still unconsciously held my hand. I put my lips to her fingers, and she released me.

'It must always be one of the very happiest memories of my life to me,' said I. 'I shall never make you believe in the joy your deliverance will fill me with.'

'Oh yes, yes!' she cried passionately; then sending a look over the quarter, she added: 'Are we not losing time? Is there not something we can do to summon her to us? Will it be long before she appears?'

'No; we are not losing time,' I answered. 'I shall have plenty of leisure to make a smoke, and that is what we must presently do. If she be the Indiaman or the corvette, all that is visible of her from yonder foretop is her royals. Her topgallant sails, her topsails, and her courses will have to climb before her hull shows. Her speed to this air will not exceed four knots. She is probably twenty miles distant yet, and we must allow her, unless the breeze freshens, a good three hours to give us a full sight of herself on that horizon out there. So let us first get something to eat, Miss Temple, and then I will go to work.'

But our excitement was too strong to suffer us to make more than a phantom of a meal. A little biscuit soaked in wine formed my companion's breakfast, but her spirits had returned to her; the remembered brilliancy was in her eyes again; a faint, most delicate flush was on her cheek; with unconscious fingers she caressed her hair as though, influenced by a womanly instinct of which she was insensible, she adjusted her tresses in preparation

of our reception by the people of the ship. She was sure it was the *Countess Ida*. There was real gaiety in the laugh with which she said that she knew Mrs. Radcliffe's character, that she could well imagine how her aunt had tormented Captain Keeling, how ceaselessly the old lady would importune the captain to make haste and recover her niece.

'Oh, what a meeting it will be!' she cried.

'The sail may prove the corvette, though,' said I.

'But she will rescue us, Mr. Dugdale, and hunt after the Indiaman, and Sir Edward will put us on board of her.'

I left her to enter the 'tweendecks, where I collected a number of mats, blankets, staves of casks, and other material, which would burn and produce a thick smoke; and presently, with the assistance of Miss Temple, had a great heap of these things stacked on deck betwixt the foremast and the mainhatch. It was a hard job to get the stuff to kindle, for the mats were damp and the staves not to be set on fire with a sulphur match. But on overhauling the lockers in the deck-house I found a tin can half full of oil and a small parcel of rags; and by means of these I set my bonfire alight. The planks of the deck were thick and wet, and securely calked, and the burning stuff was well clear of the hatch; there was no fear then, as I believed, of the fire penetrating the deck. It made a prodigious smoke. The mass of damp blankets and rags smouldered into a dark thick column, which mounted high ere it arched over to the wind. It was a signal to be sighted as far away as the ship was, and I stood watching it with transported eyes as it soared in belching folds gyrating into and blackening out upon the breeze till it showed like a steamer's smoke or a ship on fire.

I waited a little, and then got into the fore-shrouds to mark the sail afresh, and beheld the gleam of her canvas when I was still two or three ratlines below the futlock shrouds: good assurance, indeed, of her rising, and nimbly too, and heading square for us. I strained my gaze at her from the height of the top, but she was far too remote to be distinguishable; nothing more, indeed, than a little ivory shaft against the sulky sallow of the sky.

It now occurred to me that I might accentuate the signal of the smoke by letting fall the foresail, for here was a space of canvas that would not only catch the eye, but suggest the hull as a still inhabited wreck that was on fire. I called to Miss Temple. She looked up eagerly.

'Do you see those ropes leading to the deck from the arms of this yard?' said I, pointing.

'Yes.'

'I want you to haul them taut, Miss Temple—gather in the slack to prevent the yard from swinging, as I mean to get upon it.'

She understood me perfectly. Her jewelled fingers flashed upon the rope as she threw the brace off the belaying pin, and I gazed down with a smile of deep admiration at her noble figure whilst she swayed at the line, tightening and then belaying it again.

'You should have been a sailor's daughter,' I cried; 'there is the true skill of the ancient mariner in your trick of holding on with one hand and making fast with the other. Will you please now tighten the brace on the right-hand side.'

She did so, and I got upon the yard and, 'laying out' upon it, as it is called, severed with my knife the ropes with which the canvas was frapped to the spar, and down fell the sail with a large rent right amidships of it, though that signified nothing in a square of white that was to serve as a signal only. I descended to the deck.

'Why have you loosed that sail?' inquired Miss Temple. I explained. 'But will not the wreck now blow away from that ship?'

'No,' said I; 'she will fall off and come to. But the yard must be trimmed to achieve that.

So saying I let go the weather-brace and swung the yard fore and aft as far as I could bring it, then overhauled the clew-garnets, that all there was of the sail might show. The hull slewed to the pressure, then hung quiet; meanwhile I continued to feed the blaze, heaping on rugs and blankets and so firing up that at times the smoke hung as thick to leeward as a thundercloud.

CHAPTER XXII

THE 'LADY BLANCHE'

So light was the breeze, that it was drawing on to ten o'clock in the morning before the approaching vessel lay plain on the sea. Long before this I had made her out to be a square-rigged craft, and sometimes I would imagine that she was the corvette, and sometimes that she was the *Countess Ida*. It had been a time of breathless expectation, of crushing suspense. Again and again had I mounted the rigging to make sure that she had not shifted her course, and was edging away from us. Again and again had I run my eyes round the sea with a passionate prayer in my heart that the wind might hold; for if it shifted, we stood to lose the ship; and if it fell, the calm might last all day, with the prospect of another black night before us and a deserted ocean at daybreak.

But now, drawing on to this hour of ten, the hull of the vessel had risen to its bends, and though I might be certain of nothing else, it was absolutely sure that the stranger was neither the *Magicienne* nor the *Countess Ida*. She had puzzled me greatly for a considerable time; for even when her fore-course had fairly lifted she yet seemed to be rising more canvas. But by this hour I could distinguish. She was a small vessel, painted white—whether barque or ship I could not then tell. She had studdingsails out and skysails set, and showed as an airy delicate square of pearl;

and indeed I might have believed that she was the Indiaman for that reason, until her snow-white body came stealing out to the stare I fixed upon her, and then I looked at Miss Temple.

Her sight for seafaring details was not mine. She was trembling as she said: 'Which ship is she, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Neither,' I answered.

'Neither!' she cried.

'Do you not observe that yonder craft has a white hull, and that she is a small ship? But what does it matter? She is bound to see us. She will rescue us; and, let the future be what it may, our one consuming need now is to quit this hull.'

She had so reckoned upon the stranger proving either the corvette or the Indiaman, that, had the approaching craft been no more than a mirage, had the fabric melted upon the air as we watched it, she could not have looked more blank, more wildly and hopelessly disappointed.

'Neither!' she repeated, breathing with difficulty. 'Oh, Mr. Dugdale, what are we to do?'

'Why, get on board of her, in the name of God,' I cried—'giving Him thanks when we are there.'

'But she may—she will be'—she paused, unable to articulate: then with an effort: 'She may be going to another part of the world.'

'It matters not,' I answered, observing with rapture that the vessel was heading more directly for us; 'she will put us aboard something homeward bound. Will not that be better than stopping here, Miss Temple?'

'Oh yes, oh yes!' she cried; 'but if we waited a little, the Indiaman might find us.'

'Heaven forbid! we have waited long enough.'

So speaking, I rushed forward, picked up the handspike with which I had beaten upon the forecastle wall, secured a blanket to it, and, dancing aft, fell to flourishing it with all my might. Very slowly the vessel came floating down upon us with a light swaying of her trucks from side to side, and a tender twinkling of the folds of her lower canvas, which there was not weight enough in the wind to hold distended. Her hull was exceedingly graceful, and of a milky whiteness; and, as she leaned from us on some wide fold of the breathing waters, she exposed a hand's-breadth of burnished copper, which put a wonderful quality of beauty and delicacy into the whole fabric, as though she were a little model in frosted silver.

'Before she takes us on board, Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Miss Temple, 'will not you mount the rigging to see if there is another ship in sight that may prove the Indiaman?'

'But even if the Indiaman were in sight,' said I, 'we should seize this the first of our opportunities to escape from this floating tomb. For heaven's sake, let us get aboard that fellow!'

As I spoke, I seized the handspike again and frantically flourished it. All this while there was a column of smoke ascending steadily

from my fire of rugs and mats and darkening the sea over the starboard bow. I was now able to make out that the coming craft was a barque. My eyes were glued to her; my heart thumped furiously; the wildest alternations of joy and dread seized me. Suppose she should prove some foreigner in charge of a man indifferent to human life, some cold-blooded miscreant who had shifted his helm merely to satisfy his curiosity, and who, on perceiving that the smoke was no more than a signal, and that the wreck floated high, should slide quietly on and leave us to our fate? Such things had been; such things were again and again happening. As she drew with a snail-like motion abreast without touching a brace, without any signs of movement about her deck, my eyes turned dim; I feared I was about to swoon.

'Will she not stop?' exclaimed Miss Temple, in a voice of terror.

Lifting the handspike with its fluttering blanket high above my head, I waved it furiously for some moments, then flinging it down upon the deck, applied my hands to the sides of my mouth, and, in a voice of such energy that it came near to cracking every vein in my head, I yelled: 'Barque ahoy! For God's sake, send a boat and take us off.'

As the words left my throat, the vessel's helm was put down; the clew of the mainsail mounted, and her topsail yard slowly revolved, bringing every cloth upon the main aback, and in a few minutes the graceful little craft was lying without way within speaking distance of us.

In the violence of my transport, I grasped Miss Temple's hand and again and again pressed my lips to it, congratulating her and myself so, for I had no words. The figures of the people were clearly visible: a row of heads forward, the fellow at the wheel on a short raised deck, and two men dressed in white clothes with large straw hats at the mizzen rigging. One of them leisurely clambered on to the rail, and, holding by one hand to a backstay, sang out:

'Wreck ahoy! How many are there of you?'

'Two of us only,' I shouted back; 'this lady and myself.'

'Any contagious sickness?'

'No, no,' I bawled, amazed by the question. 'Pray send a boat.'

He continued to stand, as though viewing us meditatively; then, 'Wreck ahoy!'

'Hallo!' I cried, scarcely able to send my voice owing to the consternation excited in me by the man's behaviour.

'Are you a sailor?' he roared.

'Oh, say yes, say yes!' cried Miss Temple; 'he may be in want of men.'

'Ay, ay,' I cried; 'I'm a sailor.'

'What sort of sailor?'

'I belong to an Indiaman.'

'Afore the mast?'

'No, no! send a boat—I'll tell you all about it.'

He decended from the rail and apparently addressed the man that stood near, who walked to the companion-hatch and returned with a telescope; the other took it from him, then knelt down to rest the glass on the rail, and surveyed us through the lenses for at least a couple of minutes, after which he rose, returned the glass to his companion, and flourished his hand at us. I watched, utterly unable to guess what was next to happen. My fears foreboded the departure of the barque, and the impatience in me worked like madness in my blood. But mercifully we were not to be kept long in this intolerable state of suspense. A few minutes after the man, whom I supposed to be the captain, had motioned to us with his arm, a number of sailors came to the davits at the foremost extremity of the raised afterdeck, where swung a small white boat of a whaling pattern. Four of them entered her, and she sank slowly to the water's edge, where she was promptly freed from her tackles, and three oars thrown over. The fellow in the stern sheets was the man who had handed the glass to the other. The oarsmen pulled swiftly, and in a very short time the little craft was alongside.

'Only two of ye, is it?' said the fellow who grasped the tiller, a short, square, sun-blackened, coarse-looking sailor.

'Only two,' I cried.

'Any luggage?'

'No,' I answered.

'Nothen portable aboard worth carrying off, is there?'

'Yes,' I answered, cursing him in my heart for the delay these questions involved; 'there are several hams, bottles of fine wine, cheeses, and the like below.'

'Odds niggers! we'll have 'em then,' he exclaimed; and in an instant he was in the wreck's chains, wriggling over the side and calling to one of his fellows to follow him. They hung in the wind a moment, staring their hardest at Miss Temple and myself; then said the short square man in white: 'Where be the goods, master?'

I pointed to the hatch in the deck-house, and directed them to what I called the pantry. But nothing could have induced me to leave the deck. As they disappeared I stepped to the side where the bulwarks were gone.

'Bring the boat close under, my lads,' I exclaimed to the two fellows in her, 'and stand by to receive the lady.'

The hull was rolling gently, with just enough of depression to render a jump into the little fabric as it rose very easy and safe. 'Now, Miss Temple,' I cried. She sprang without an instant's hesitation, was caught by one of the sailors, and in a jiffy the pair of us were snug in the stern sheets side by side.

The two men could not take their eyes off us. They surveyed us with countenances of profound astonishment, running their gaze over Miss Temple as though she were some creature of another

world: as well they might, indeed, seeing the contrast between the groaning, mutilated, smoking hull and this girl leaping from her deck in the choice and elegant attire of the highest fashion, as the two poor devils would imagine—for what eye would *they* have for the disorder of her apparel?—and her hands, breast, and ears sparkling with jewels of value and splendour.

'Are ye English, sir?' said one of them, a middle-aged man, of an honest cast of countenance, with minute eyes deep sunk in his head, and a pair of greyish whiskers uniting at his throat.

'Why, yes, to be sure,' I answered.

'The lady too, sir?'

'Yes, man, yes. What ship are you?'

'The *Lady Blanche*,' he answered.

'Where bound?'

'To Mauritius, from the river Thames.'

I glanced at Miss Temple; but either she had not heeded the fellow's answer or her mind failed to collect its meaning.

'Been long aboard here, sir?' said the man, indicating the hull by a sideways motion of his head.

'Two nights,' I answered. 'There should be a corvette and an Indiaman close at hand hereabouts. Have you met with either ship?'

'No, sir.'

'Sighted no sail at all?'

'Nothen like un,' exclaimed the other sailor. 'Th' ocean's gone and growed into a Hafrican desert.'

The square man in white, followed by his attendant seaman, arrived at the side, bearing between them a blanket loaded with the produce of the pantry, to judge by the clinking of bottle glass and the orbicular bulgings of cheeses and rounds of hams.

'Catch this here bundle now,' sung out the square man, who, later on, I ascertained was the barque's carpenter, acting also as the second mate. 'Handsomely over the bricks. It's wine, bullies.'

The blanket and its contents were received, and deposited in the bottom of the boat. The men entered her, and we shoved off.

'Did you make up that there fire, sir?' inquired the square man, bringing his eyes in a stare of astonishment from Miss Temple to myself.

'Yes; nobody else. This lady and I are alone.'

'Then you've set the bloomin' hull on fire,' said he.

I started, and sent a look at the column of smoke, at which I had never once glanced whilst lying alongside, so distracted was my attention by the multiplicity of emotions which surged in me. There was no need to gaze long to gather that more was going to the making of the coils of smoke which were now rising in soot than the nearly consumed remains of the mats and rugs which I had stacked and fed.

'The fire's burnt clean through the deck,' said the square man, 'and there are some casks in flames just forrads of the main hatch. What might they have contained, d'ye know?'

'I don't know,' I answered, trembling like a half-frozen kitten as I watched the smoke, and thought of what must have come to us if yonder barque's approach had been delayed!

'I suppose there'll be gunpowder aboard?' continued the square man. 'Pull, lads! If a bust-up happens, it'll find us too near at this.'

The men bent their backs, and the sharp-ended little boat went smoking through the quiet rippling waters. Nothing more was said. The square man, whose rugged, weather-blackened face preserved an inimitable air of amazement, eyed us askant, particularly running his gaze over Miss Temple's attire, and letting it rest upon her rings. The toil of the seamen kept them silent. For my part, I was too overcome to utter a word. The passion of delight excited by our deliverance—that is to say, as signified by our rescue by the barque—was paralysed by the horror with which I viewed the growing denseness of the smoke rising from the hull. She was on fire! Great heaven, what would have been our fate—without a boat, without the materials for the construction of a raft—with no more than a few staves of casks to hold by! Such a sea-brigand as the wreck had been in her day was sure to have a liberal store of gunpowder stowed somewhere below: in all probability, in a magazine in the hold under her cabin. What, then, would there have been for us to do? We must either have sought death by leaping overboard, or awaited the horrible annihilation of an explosion!

Miss Temple's eyes were large, and her lips and her face bloodless, as though she were in a swoon. She was seeing how it was, and how it must have been with us, and she seemed smitten to the motionlessness of a statue by the perception as she sat by my side staring at the receding hull.

We swept to the little gangway ladder that had been dropped over the rail, and with some difficulty I assisted the girl over the side, swinging by the main-rope with one hand and supporting her waist with the other. The man who had hailed us stood at the gangway. I instantly went up to him with my hand outstretched.

'Sir,' said I, 'you are the captain, no doubt. I thank you for this deliverance, for this preservation of our lives, for this rescue from what *now* must have proved a horrible doom of fire.'

He took my hand and held it without answering, whilst he continued to stare at me with an intentness that in a very few moments astonished and embarrassed me.

'What is your name, sir?' he presently said.

'Laurence Dugdale,' I answered.

'Mate of an Indiaman, I think you said, sir?'

'No,' I replied. 'I was for two years at sea in an Indiaman as midshipman.'

He let fall my hand, and his face changed whilst he recoiled a step, meanwhile running his eyes from top to toe of me.

'A midshipman?' he exclaimed, with an accent of contempt.

'Why, a midshipman ain't a *sailor*! How long ago is it since you was a midshipman?'

'Six years,' I answered, completely bewildered by questioning of this sort at such a moment.

'Six years!' he cried, whilst his face grew longer still. 'Why, then, I don't suppose you'll even *know* what a quadrant means?'

'Certainly I know all about it,' I answered, with a half-glance at Miss Temple, who stood beside me listening to these questions in a torment of surprise and suspense.

'Are ye acquainted with navigation, then?' inquired the captain.

'Sufficiently well, I believe, to enable me to carry a ship to any part of the world,' I rejoined, controlling my rising temper, though I was sensible that there was blood in my cheeks and that my eyes were expressing my mood.

'Why, then, that's all right!' he cried, brightening up. 'You tell me you could find your way about with a sextant?'

'Yes, sir, I have told you so.'

'By heaven! then,' he roared, 'I'm glad to see ye! Welcome aboard the *Lady Blanche*, sir. And you, mem, I am sure.' Here he pulled off his immense straw hat and gave Miss Temple an unspeakably grotesque bow. 'What have you got there?' he bawled to the square man.

'A blanket full of wines and cheeses and 'ams,' answered the man, who was helping to manœuvre the bundle inboards over the side.

'All right, all right!' shouted the captain. 'Now put 'em down, do, and get your boat hooked on and hoisted, d'ye hear? and get your topsail yard swung. Why, who's been and set that wreck on fire?'

'The flare's burnt through her deck,' cried the square man in a surly tone, 'and I allow she'll be ablowing up in a few minutes.'

But she was too far distant to suffer this conjecture to alarm the captain.

'Let her blow up,' said he; 'there's room enough for her,' and then, giving Miss Temple another convulsive bow, he invited us to step into the cabin.

This was a little state-room under the short after-deck, and, with its bulkheaded berths abaft, a miniature likeness in its way of the *Countess Ida's* saloon. It was a cosy little place, with a square table amidships, a bench on either hand of it screwed to the deck, a flat skylight overhead, a couple of old-fashioned lamps, a small stove near to the trunk of the mizzen-mast, a rack full of tumblers, and so forth.

'Sit ye down, mem,' said the captain, pointing to a bench. 'Sir, be seated. I heard Mr. Lush just now talk of wines, and cheeses, and hams; but what d'ye say to a cut of boiled beef and a bottle of London stout? Drifting about in a wreck ain't wholesome for the soul, I believe; but I never heard that it affected the appetite.'

'You are very good,' I exclaimed; 'our food for the last three days has been no more than ship's bread and marmalade—poor fare for the lady, fresh from the comforts and luxuries of an Indiaman's cuddy.'

He went to the cabin door and bawled; and a young fellow, whom I afterwards found out was his servant, came running aft. He gave him certain directions, then returned to the table, where he sat for a long two minutes first staring at me and then at Miss Temple without a wink of his eyes. I observed that my companion shrunk from this extraordinary silent scrutiny. I had never witnessed in any other human head such eyes as that fellow had. They were a deformity by their size, being about twice too big for the width and length of his face, of a deep ink-black, resembling discs of ebony gummed upon china. There was no glow, no mind in them, that I could distinguish, scarcely anything of vitality outside their preternatural capacity of staring, that was yet immeasurably heightened by the steadiness of the lids, which I never once beheld blinking. His face was long and yellow, closely shorn, and of an indigo blue down the cheeks, upon the chin, and upon the upper lip. He had a very long aquiline nose with large nostrils, which constantly dilated, as though he snuffed up rather than breathed the air. His eyebrows were extraordinarily thick, and met in a peculiar tuft in the indent of the skull above the nose; whilst his hair, black as his eyes, and smooth and gleaming as the back of a raven, lay combed over his ears down upon his back. He was dressed in a suit of white drill, the flowing extremities of his trousers rounding to his feet in the shape of the mouth of a bell, from which protruded a pair of long square-toed shoes of yellow leather. I should instantly have put him down as a Yankee but for his accent, that was cockney beyond the endurance of a polite ear.

I broke into his intolerable scrutiny by asking him from what port his ship hailed; but he continued to stare at me in silence for some considerable time after I had made this inquiry. He then started, flourished a great red cotton pocket-handkerchief to his brow, and exclaimed: 'Sir, you spoke?'

I repeated the question.

'The *Lady Blanche* is owned at Hull,' said he; 'but we're from the Thames for Mauritius. And what's your story? How came you and this beautiful lady aboard that hull? You're gentlefolks, I allow. I see breeding in your hands, mem,' fixing his unwinking eyes upon her rings. 'You talk of an Indeeman. Let's have it all afore the boiled beef comes along.'

So saying, he hooked his thumbs in his waistcoat, brought his back against the table, and forking his long shanks out, sat in a posture of attention, keeping his amazing eyes bent on my face whilst I spoke. It did not take me very long to give him the tale. He listened without so much as a syllable escaping from him, and when I had made an end, he continued to gaze at me in silence.

'By what name shall I address you?' said Miss Temple.

He started, as before, and answered: 'John Braine; Captain John Braine, mem; or call it Captain Braine: John's only in the road. That's my name, mem.'

She forced a smile, and said: 'Captain Braine, the *Countess Ida* cannot be far distant, and I have most earnestly to entreat you to seek her. I am sure she is to be found after a very short hunt. I have a dear relative on board of her, who will fret her heart away if she believes I am lost. All my luggage, too, is in that ship. My mother, Lady Temple, will most cheerfully pay any sum that may be asked for such trouble and loss of time as your search for the Indiaman might occasion.'

I thought he meant to stare at her without answering; but after a short pause he exclaimed: 'The Indeeman's bound to Bombay, ain't she? Well, we're a-navigating the same road she's taking. It is three days since you lost her; where'll she be now, then? That can only be known to the angels, which look down from a taller height than there's e'er a truck afloat that'll come nigh. Now, mem, I might shift my hellum and dodge about for a whole fortnight and do no good. It would be the same as making up our minds to lose her. But by keeping all on as we are, there'll ne'er be an hour that won't hold inside of it a chance of our rising her on one bow or t'other. See what I mean, mem? You're aboard of a barque with legs, as Jack says. Your Indeeman's had a three days' start; and if so be as she *is* to be picked up, I'll engage to have ye aboard of her within a week. But to dodge about in search of her—the Lord love'ee, mem! The sea's too big for any sort of chiveying.'

'I am completely of Captain Braine's opinion,' said I, addressing Miss Temple, whose face was full of distress and dismay. 'It would be unreasonable to expect this gentleman to delay his voyage by a search that, in all human probability, must prove unprofitable. A hunt would involve the loss of our one chance of falling in with her this side the Cape.'

She clasped her hands and hung her head, but made no reply. The captain's servant entered at that moment with a tray of food, which he placed upon the table; and the skipper bidding us fall to and make ourselves at home in a voice as suggestive of the croak of a raven as was his hair of the plumage of that bird, stalked on to the deck, where the sailors—who by this time had hoisted the boat and trimmed the barque's yards—were coiling down the gear and returning to the various jobs they had been upon before they had hove the ship to.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAPTAIN BRAINE

After three days of sailors' biscuit and strong cheese and marmalade of the flavour of foot sugar, the lump of cold salt beef that the captain's man set before me ate to my palate with a relish that I had never before found in the choicest and most exquisitely cooked meat; and a real treat, too, to my shipwrecked sensibilities, was the inspiration of home and civilisation in the tumbler of foaming London stout. Miss Temple seemed too harassed, too broken down in mind, to partake of food; but by dint of coaxing and entreating I got her to taste a mouthful, and then put her lips to a glass of stout; and presently she appeared to find her appetite by eating, as the French say, and ended with such a repast as I could have wished to see her make.

When the man put the tray down, he went out, and the girl and I were alone during the meal. Now that I had recovered from the first heart-subduing shock of the discovery that the hull was on fire, and could realise that, even supposing she had not been set on fire, we had still been delivered from what in all probability must have proved a long, lingering, soul-killing time of expectation, dying out into hopelessness and into a period of famine, thirst, and death: I say now that I could realise our rescue from these horrors, my spirits mounted, my joy was an intoxication, I could have cried and laughed at the same time, like one in hysteria. I longed to jump from my chair and dance about the cabin that I might vent the oppression of my transports by movement. I was but a young man, and life was dear to me, and we had been in dire peril, and were safe. What a paradise was this cosy little cabin after that ghost-haunted, narrow crib of a deck-house! How soothing beyond all words to the nerves was the light floating rolling of the graceful little snow-white barque, under control of her helm, and vitalised in every plank by the impulse of her airy soaring canvas, compared with the jerky, feverish, staggering, tumblefication of the wreck, with its deadly deck leaning at desperate angles to the fang-like remnants of the crushed bulwarks, and its uncovered hatches yawning to the heavens, as though in a dumb mouthing of entreaty for extinction!

'Oh! Miss Temple,' I cried, 'I cannot bring my mind to believe in our good fortune! This time yesterday! how hopeless we were! And now we are safe! I thank God, I most humbly thank God, for His mercy! Your lot would soon have become a frightful one aboard that wreck.'

'Yet what would I give,' she exclaimed, 'if this ship were the *Countess Ida*! What is to become of us? For how long are we to wander about in a state of destitution, Mr. Dugdale—mere beggars, without apparel, without conveniences, dependent for

our very meals upon the bounty of strangers?' And she brought her eyes, with the old flash in them, from the table to my face, at which she gazed with an expression of temper and mortification.

'You would not be a woman,' said I, 'if you did not think of your dress. But, pray, consider this: that your baggage is now recoverable; whereas, but for this *Lady Blanche*——'

'Oh! but it would have been so happy a thing, that might so easily have happened too, had this vessel been the Indiaman.'

'Cannot you summon a little patience to your aid?' said I. 'Our strange-eyed captain spoke with judgment when he suggested the probability of your exchanging his ship for the *Countess Ida* within a week.'

'Well, I will be patient, if I can,' said she, looking down with an air of trouble and distress in the pout of her lip; 'but is it not about time that the adventure ended?'

'Suppose it may be only now beginning?'

She gave me a side-glance and exclaimed somewhat haughtily: 'I really believe, Mr. Dugdale, you enjoy this sort of experiences; and if I were a man—— But it *must* end!' she added with an air as though she was about to weep. 'It is unendurable to think of being carried about the world in this fashion. I shall insist—well, I shall bribe Captain Braine to question every ship he passes as to her destination, and the first vessel we encounter that is going home I shall go on board of.'

'Alone?' said I.

'No,' she answered, half closing her eyes and looking a little away from me; 'you would not suffer me to travel alone. Besides, do not you want to get home too?'

'I would rather find my way to Bombay,' said I. 'My baggage as well as yours is aboard the *Countess Ida*, and I should like to get it, though not at the cost of too much trouble. I am bound to India on a visit, and am not expected home for a good many months. Now, I don't see why both of us shouldn't keep our appointments by sticking in this barque, and sailing in her to the Mauritius, whence we ought to be able, without difficulty, to ship ourselves for Bombay. The *Lady Blanche* has the hull of a clipper, and it will be strange if the pair of us are not ashore at Bombay some weeks before the *Countess Ida* sails.'

She listened with impatience, and when I had ended, said: 'If the chance offers, I shall certainly go home. I shall take the first ship that passes, though it should cost a thousand pounds to bribe Captain Braine and the commander of the vessel that receives me. How is it possible for me to continue thus?' and here she looked at her dress. 'And where is Mauritius? Is it not nearly as far off as Bombay? Whereas England is not so very remote from this part of the ocean.'

'Well, Miss Temple, I am your humble servant,' said I. 'Head as you will, I shall most dutifully follow you.'

'I beg that you will not be satirical.'

'God forbid!' said I, averting my eyes; for I was sensible that they were expressing more than I had any desire she should observe. 'I wish to see you safe, and meanwhile happy. If we pick up a ship homeward bound, we can commission Captain Braine to request Keeling, if he encounters him, to transfer our baggage to the first craft he speaks going to England. Your aunt's maid will know all about your luggage.'

She watched me, as though doubtful whether I was joking or not; but I was cut short by the entrance of Captain Braine.

'I hope you have done pretty well?' he exclaimed, after gazing at us for a short time without speaking; it is poor fare, mem, for the likes of you. But the ship'll afford nothing fresh till we kill a pig. What did you say your name was, sir?'

'Dugdale,' said I.

'Ha!' he cried, whilst he viewed me steadfastly, 'to be sure. Dugdale. That was it. Well, Mr. Dugdale, there might be an edifying sight for you and the lady to behold from the deck.'

'What?' swiftly exclaimed Miss Temple with a start.

'The hull, mem, we took you from,' he replied in his hollow, somewhat deep voice, 'is rapidly growing into a big blaze.'

Her face changed to a mood of disappointment. I believe she thought that the captain had come to announce the Indiaman in sight: I was about to speak:

'Captain Braine,' she said, approaching him by a dramatic stride, and exclaiming proudly, as though she would subdue him by her mere manner to acquiescence in her wishes, 'I am without wearing apparel, saving the attire in which you now view me, and it is absolutely necessary I should return home as speedily as possible. My mother will fear that I have perished, and I must be the bearer of my own news, or the report of my being lost may cause her death, so exceedingly delicate is her health. She is rich, and will reward you in any sum you may think proper to demand for enabling me to return to England quickly.'

An indescribable smile as she said these words crept over the man's face and vanished. I was strongly impressed by the expression of it, and observed him closely.

'Therefore, Captain Braine,' she proceeded, 'I have to entreat you to promise me that you will signal to the ships you may pass, and put me on board the first one, no matter what sort of vessel she be, that is sailing directly to England.'

He silently surveyed her, and then directed his eyes at me.

'You 'll be wanting to get home too, sir, I suppose?' said he.

'Oh, yes,' I replied. 'Miss Temple is under my care, and I must see her safe.'

He turned to her again, and stood staring; then said; 'That'll be all right, mem; we're bound to be falling in with something coming along presently; and if England's her destination and she'll receive ye, the boat that brought you from the hull shall take you to her, weather permitting. That'll do, I think?'

She bowed, looking as pleased as agitation and anxiety would allow her.

'Come now and take a look at the hull,' continued Captain Braine; 'and then——'

'You quite understand, I hope,' she interrupted, 'that any sum——'

He broke in with an odd flourish of his hand. 'No need to mention that matter, mem,' he exclaimed; 'we are Christian men in that part of the country where I come from, and there's never no talk of pay amongst us for doing what the Lord directs—succouring distressed fellow-creatures.'

With which he spun upon his heels and walked out of the cabin, leaving us to follow him.

I had no eyes nor thoughts for anything else than the hull the moment I saw her. I remember recoiling as to a blow, and panting for a few breaths with my hand to my side. She had slipped to something more than two miles away down on the starboard quarter, and although only a portion of her was as yet on fire, she was showing as a body of flame brilliant and forked, soaring and drooping against the leaden-hued background of sky. Shudder after shudder went like ice through me as my sight swept the mighty girdle of the deep, coming back to the little body of flame that most horribly to every trembling instinct in me accentuated the lonely immensity of the surface on which it glowed.

'Think—if we were on her now!' I muttered to Miss Temple. She hid her face.

'Was there any valleyables aboard her, Mr. Dugdale, d'ye know?' said the captain.

'I cannot tell you,' I answered in a voice subdued by emotion; 'I did not search the sleeping-berths. There was little enough in her hold.'

'Ye should have crept away down in the run,' said he; 'that's where the chaps which peopled her would stow their booty if they had any. If I'd known she'd been a privateersman—— How came ye to set her on fire?'

'My signal burnt through her deck, so I was informed by that gentleman there,' I replied, indicating the square man, who stood a little way from us.

'Was that so, Mr. Lush?' cried the captain.

'Was what so?' asked Mr. Lush. The captain explained. 'Well, I dunno,' answered the other; 'there was fire in the hold when I looked down, and it seemed to me as if flakes of it was falling through the deck. But what does it signify? Wood ain't cast-iron, and if ye makes a flare upon a timber deck, why, then what I says is, stand by!'

'Oh look, Mr. Dugdale!' shrieked Miss Temple at that moment, tossing her arms in horror, and standing with her hands upraised, as though in a posture of calling down a curse upon the distant thing.

My eye was on the wreck, as hers had been, and I saw it all. There was a huge crimson flash, as though some volcanic head had belched in fire; daylight as it was, the stretch of clouds above and beyond the wreck glared out in a dull rusty red to the amazing stream of flame; a volume of smoke white as steam, shaped like a balloon, and floating solid to the sight, slowly rose like some phenomenal emanation from the secret depths of the ocean. There followed the sullen, deep-throated blast of the explosion. Captain Braine snatched a telescope from the skylight and levelled it, and after peering a little, thrust the glass into my hand.

'See if you can find out where she's gone to,' said he with a singular grin, in which his eyes did not participate.

I looked: the water delicately brushed by the light wind flowed in nakedness under the shadow of the slowly soaring and enlarging cloud of white smoke. Not the minutest point of black, not the merest atom of fragment of wreck, was visible. I put down the glass with a quivering hand, and going to the rail, looked into the sea to conceal my moist eyes, too overcome to speak.

'A good job you weren't in that hull, mem,' said the captain to Miss Temple; 'it would be sky high with any one that had been there by this time: a devil of a mount, as Jack says. But you're aboard a tidy little ship now. If so be that you are at all of a nautical judge, mem, cast your eyes aloft and tell me if there's e'er an Indeeman or a man-of-war, too, if ye will, with spars stayed as my masts is, with such a fit of canvas, with such a knowing cocked-ear like look as the run of them yardarms has, with such mastheads tapering away like the holy spire of a meeting-house, and that beautiful little skysail atop to sarve as a cloud for any tired angel that may be flying along to rest upon! Ha!'

He drew so deep a breath as he concluded that I turned to look at him. He stood gazing up at the canvas on the main as though in an ecstasy; his hands were crossed upon his breast after the manner of coy virgins in paintings; his right knee was crooked and projected; I could not have imagined so curious a figure off the stage. Indeed, I supposed he was acting now to divert Miss Temple. I glanced at the tough, sullen, storm-darkened face of old Lush, to gather his opinion on the behaviour of this captain; but his expression was of wood, and there was no other meaning in it that I could distinguish save what was put there by the action of his jaws as he gnawed upon a junk of tobacco, carrying his sight from seawards to aloft and back again as regularly as the swing of the spars.

Miss Temple drew to my side with a manner of uneasiness about her. She whispered, while she seemed to be speaking of the wreck, motioning with her hand in the direction of the smoke that was slowly drawing on to our beam in a great staring, still-compacted mass, white as a fog against the leaden heaven: 'I believe he is not in his right mind.' 'No matter,' I swiftly replied; 'his ship is sound. Captain,' I exclaimed, 'I hope you will have a spare

cabin for this lady. For my part, you may sling me a hammock anywhere, or a rug and a plank will make me all the bed I want.'

'Oh, there's accommodation for ye both below,' he answered; 'there's the mate's berth unoccupied. The lady can have that. And next door to it there's a cabin with a bunk in it. I'll have it cleared out for you. Come down and see for yourselves.'

He led the way into the little cuddy, as I may term it, and conducted us to a hatch close against the two sleeping berths right aft. He descended a short flight of steps, and we found ourselves in 'tweendecks in which I should not have been able to stand erect with a tall hat on. It was gloomy down here. I could distinguish with difficulty a number of cases of light goods stowed from the deck to the beams, and completely blocking up all the forward portion of this part of the vessel. There were two cabins in the extremity corresponding with the cabins above, with such another small hatch as we had descended through lying close against them, but covered: the entrance as I took it to 'the run' or 'lazarette.' Captain Braine opened the cabin door on the port side, and we peered into a small but clean and airy berth lighted by a large scuttle. I noticed a couple of sea-chests, a suit of oil-skins hanging under a little shelf full of books, a locker, a mattress, and a bundle of blankets in the bunk, a large chart of the English Channel nailed against the side, and other matters of a like sort.

'You'll be able to make yourself pretty comfortable here, mem,' said Captain Braine.

'Are there any rats?' asked Miss Temple, rolling her eyes nervously over the deck.

'Bless you, no!' answered the captain. 'At the very worst, a cockroach here and there, mem.'

'But this cabin is occupied,' said I.

'It was, young gentleman, it was,' he exclaimed, in a hollow raven voice, that wonderfully corresponded with his countenance, and particularly somehow or other with his hair—'it was my chief mate's cabin. But he's dead, sir.' He gazed at me steadfastly, and added, 'Dead and gone, sir.'

Miss Temple slightly started, and with a hurried glance at the bunk, asked how long the man had been dead.

'Three weeks,' responded Captain Braine, preserving his sepulchral tone, as though he supposed it was the correct voice in which to deliver melancholy information.

'May I see the next cabin?' said Miss Temple.

'Certainly,' he answered; and going out he opened the door.

This room was the same size as the berth which adjoined it; but it was crowded with a collection of sailmakers' and boatswains' stores, bolts of canvas, new buckets, scrubbing-brushes, and so on. There was a bunk under the scuttle full of odds and ends.

'I would rather occupy this berth than the other,' said Miss Temple.

'You're not afraid of ghosts, mem?' exclaimed the captain, fixing his immense dead black eyes upon her.

I presume this room can be cleared out, and I prefer it to the other,' she answered haughtily.

I broke in, somewhat alarmed by these airs: 'Oh, by all means, Miss Temple. Choose the cabin you best like. Captain Braine is all kindness in furnishing us with such excellent accommodation. This stuff can be put into my berth, if you please, captain. I shall merely need room enough to get into my bunk.'

'I'll make that all right,' he answered somewhat sulkily. 'How about bedding? The lady's a trifle particular, I fear. She wouldn't be satisfied to roll herself up in a dead man's blanket, I guess.'

'Leave me to manage,' said I, forcing a note of cheerfulness into my voice, though I was greatly vexed by Miss Temple's want of tact. 'There's more bedding than either of us will require in less than a bolt of your canvas. We are fresh from an experience that would make a paradise of your forepeak, captain. And so,' said I, plunging from the subject, in the hope of carrying off the ill-humour that showed in his face, 'you are without a chief mate?'

'I'll tell you about that by-and-by,' said he. 'This here crib, then, is to be the lady's? Now, what have I got that you'll be wanting, mem? There's a bit of a looking-glass next door. He used to shave himself in it. You won't mind that perhaps? His image ain't impressed on the plate. It'll show ye true as you are, for all that he shaved himself in it.'

Miss Temple smiled, and said that she would be glad to have the glass.

'There'll be his hair-brush,' continued Captain Braine, 'though *that* might prove objctionable,' he added doubtfully, talking with his eyes fixed unwinkingly upon her. 'And yet I don't know; if it was put to soak in a bucket of salt-water, it ought to come out sweet enough. There's likewise a comb,' he proceeded, taking his chin betwixt his thumb and forefinger and stroking it; 'there's nothing to hurt in a comb, and it's at your sarvice, mem. If poor old Chicken were here, he'd be very willing, I'm sure; but he's gone—gone dead.'

He looked at Miss Temple again. I watched him with attention. He seemed to sink into a fit of musing; then, waking up out of it in a sudden way, he cried: 'You've got no luggage at all, have ye, mem?'

'No,' responded Miss Temple with gravity.

'I'm sorry,' said he, 'that I didn't bring Mrs. Braine along with me this voyage. She wanted to come, poor thing, observing me to be but very ordinary during most of the time I was ashore—very ordinary indeed,' he repeated, shaking his head. 'If she was here we could manage.'

'Pray, give yourself no concern on that head, captain,' said I; 'we shall be falling in with the Indiaman presently; and supposing

the worst to come to the worst—what time do you give yourself for the run from here to the Mauritius?'

'I'm not agoing to say—I'm not agoing to say!' he cried with an accent of excitement that astonished me; 'what's the good of talking when you don't know? Wouldn't it be a sin to go and make promises to people in your condition and disappoint 'em? I can just tell ye this: that Baltimore itself never turned out a keel able to clip through it as this here *Lady Blanche* can when the chance is given her. And now,' he exclaimed, changing his voice, 'suppose we clear out of this, and go up into the daylight and fresh air:' and without pausing for an answer he trudged off.

I handed Miss Temple up the ladder, and we gained the little cabin, or living-room as it might be termed. The young fellow who acted as steward or servant was busy at the glass-rack. The captain called to him, and peremptorily and most intelligently gave him certain instructions with respect to the clearing out and preparing of the berths below for our reception. He told him where he would find a spare mattress—'Quite new, never yet slept on,' he said, contorting his figure into a bow to Miss Temple—he had a couple of shawls and a homely old rug which had made several voyages, and these were to be put into her bunk; the man was to see that the lady lacked no convenience which the barque could afford. 'The late Mr. Chicken's mattress was to be given to me along with his bedding, if so be that I was willing to use the same.' Other instructions, all expressive of foresight and hospitable consideration, he gave to the fellow, who then went forward to obtain help to clear out the cabins.

'We are deeply indebted to you, captain,' said I, 'for this very generous behaviour——'

'Not a word, sir, if you please,' he interrupted. 'I have a soul as well as another, and I know my duty. Lady, a hint: you have some fine jewelry upon you; take my advice and put it in your pocket.'

She was alarmed by this, and looked at me.

I smiled, and said, 'The captain of a ship is Lord Paramount; his orders must be obeyed, Miss Temple.'

Without another word she began to pull off her rings, the skipper steadfastly watching her.

'Will you take charge of them for me, Mr. Dugdale?' said she.

I placed them in my pocket. She then took off a very beautiful diamond locket from her throat, and this I also carefully stowed away.

'I will remove my earrings presently,' she exclaimed with a slight flush in her cheek and a sparkle as of ire in her gaze, though her lips still indicated an emotion of dismay.

'My advice to you is—at once, mem,' said the captain.

'We must believe that Captain Braine is fully sensible of the meaning of his requests,' said I, answering the glance she shot at me.

She removed the earrings and gave them to me. The captain stood running his eyes over her figure; then, with a melodramatic gesture, pointed to her watch. This, too, with the handsome chain belonging to it, I pocketed. He now addressed himself to contemplating me.

'You don't need to show any watch-chain,' said he, speaking with his head drooping towards his left shoulder; 'there's no good in that signet ring either. As to the breast-pin'—he half-closed one eye—'well, perhaps that's a thing that won't hurt where it is.'

He waited until I had taken off my ring and dropped my chain into my waistcoat pocket, and then, looking first of all aft and then forward, then up at the little skylight, whilst he seemed to hold his breath as though intently listening, he approached us, as we stood together, by a stride, and said in a low deep voice, tremulous with intensity of utterance: 'My men are not to be trusted. Hush! If they imagined I suspected them, they would cut my throat and heave me overboard.'

Miss Temple took my arm.

'Let me understand you,' said I, wrestling with my amazement. 'In what sense are they untrustworthy?'

He stared eagerly and nervously about him again, and then, extending the fingers of his left hand, he touched one of them after another, as though counting, whilst he said: 'First, I have reason to believe that Lush, the carpenter, who acts as my second mate, committed a murder four years ago.'

'Good God!' I ejaculated.

'Hold!' he cried. 'Next, there ain't no shadow of a doubt that two at least of my able seamen are escaped convicts. Next, there is a man forward who was concerned in a mutiny that ended in the ringleaders being hung. Next'—he paused, and then exclaimed: 'but no need to go on alarming the lady.'

'But were you not acquainted with these men's characters at the time of their signing articles?' said I.

'No, young man, no,' he answered with a most melancholy shake of the head; 'it's all come out since, and a deal more atop of it. But hush! Discretion is the better part of valour, as Jack says. There's no call to be afraid. They know the man I am, and what's better, they know I know *them*. Ye're quite safe, mem; only, don't be a-tempting sailors of their sort by a sight of the valleyables you've been a-carrying about with you. And now, perhaps you'll excuse me whilst I goes and looks after the ship.'

He gave us another extraordinary bow—I never met with any posture-maker who approached this man in the capacity of distorting his person—and walked out of the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CREW OF THE BARQUE

Miss Temple released my arm and sank upon a bench.

'Can you doubt now that he is mad?' she exclaimed.

'Somewhat eccentric, certainly, but perhaps not mad, though. He is treating us very kindly. How intelligently he instructed his man in regard to our cabins!'

'He may be kind; but I believe we should have been safer on the hull than here.'

'Oh, no, no, no!'

'But I say yes,' she exclaimed in her most imperious air, and gazing at me with hot and glowing eyes. 'It is quite true the wreck was burnt; but if this vessel had not come into sight, you would not have signalled, and then the hull would not have been set on fire. It is maddening to think that perhaps within the next three or four hours the Indiaman or the corvette may sail over the very spot where the wreck blew up.'

'I heartily hope that one or the other will do so,' said I; 'for if she be so close to us as all that, we're bound to fall in with her.'

She looked at her hands, turning her fingers back and front, as though they were some novel and unexpected sight to her.

'I wonder, Mr. Dugdale,' said she, 'you can doubt that the man is insane. Remember the extraordinary questions he put to you when we first arrived. I believe, had you told him you were ignorant of navigation, he would have sent us back to the wreck. And then how he stares! There is something shocking in the fixed regard of his dreadfully inanimate black eyes. What a very extraordinary face, too! I cannot believe that he is a sailor. He has the appearance of a monk just released from some term of fearful penance and mortification.'

'On the other hand, he has received us very kindly. He would not suffer you to speak of paying him. He promptly set us down to such entertainment as his vessel furnishes. He may be mad half-way round the compass, but all the rest of the points are sound.'

'I am astonished,' she cried with a manner of petulant vivacity, 'to hear you say that we are safer in this ship than had we remained in the hull. There we were alone; but who are the people with whom we must be locked up in this vessel until we sight the Indiaman or some sail that will receive us? A murderer—convicts—mutineers—a crew of men in whose sight a jewel must not be exhibited lest they should be tempted. Tempted to what?' She violently shuddered. 'How can you speak of this ship as safer than the wreck?'

'Because I happen to feel quite certain that she is; but I will not say so, for it vexes you to hear me.'

'Oh this ridiculous, this horribly ridiculous degrading situation

fills me with anger. To think of being reduced to a perfect state of squalor—having to conceal one's jewelry for fear of—of—something awful, I am sure ; and you dare not, though you *could* name it, Mr. Dugdale.' I smiled, and her warmth increased. 'That I should have been ever tempted,' she proceeded, 'to undertake the odious voyage to Bombay, for *this*! To be without a change of dress, to be obliged to sleep in a little dark horrid cabin, and meanwhile not to have the least notion when it is all to end!'

Well, thought I, as I looked at her eyes shining with spirit and temper, and marked the faint hectic of her ill-humour in her cheeks, the expression of mingled pride and fretfulness in her lips, the wrathful rising and falling of her breast, here, to be sure, is a new version of the play of Katharine and Petruchio ; only, though she be Kate to the life, it is not I, but old daddy Neptune who is to break her spirit, and unshrew her into somebody's very humble servant. But is there any magic, I thought, even in ocean's rough, brutal, unconscionable usage to render docile such a woman as this? Nay, would any man wish it otherwise with her than as it is when he gazes at her eyes and figure, beholds the dignity and haughtiness of her carriage, the assumption of maiden sovereignty visible in every move of her arm, in every curl of her lip, in every motion of her form!

'What are you thinking of?' she asked : 'you are plunged in thought. I hope you are struggling to do justice to my perception of the truth.'

I started, and then laughed out. 'I will not tell you what I was thinking of,' said I ; 'but I will express what was in my mind whilst you were speaking just now. You dwell with horror upon the captain's account of his crew. Well, I heartily wish for both our sakes that they were an honest straight-headed body of men. But then every ship's forecastle is a menagerie. There is ruffianism, and there is respectability. Quite likely that the carpenter Lush may have killed a man ; but one must hear the story before deciding to call him a murderer. So of the convicts ; so of the mutineers. In many ships at sea there is unspeakable provocation, and crimes are committed of which the blood rests upon the head of anyone sooner than those who are held guilty and punished by the law. I am not to be greatly frightened by Captain Braine's talk of his crew, particularly since in a few days we may either be on board the Indiaman or homeward-bound in another ship. Let us now go on deck. I wish to take a view of the sailors, and see what sort of a craft this is, for as yet I have seen but little of her.'

I could not help remarking that she kept very close to me as we made our way out of the cuddy, and that the glances she directed forwards where some seamen were at work were full of apprehension. The short poop of the *Lady Blanche* was gained by a central ladder falling fair in the face of the little doorway of the cuddy front with its two small windows and row of buckets. A low, handsomely carved wooden rail was fixed athwart the break of this

raised deck, and I stood with Miss Temple at a point of it that provided me with a clear view fore and aft. The captain sat on a grating abaft the wheel reading. Mr. Lush was near the mizzen rigging, gazing seawards with a stubborn wooden expression of face. After the spacious decks and wide topgallant-forecastle of the Indiaman, this little *Lady Blanche* looked a mere toy. But though a ship shows least admirably from her own deck, I found a deal to please and even delight me in the first comprehensive look I threw around. She was as clean as a yacht; the insides of her bulwarks were painted a delicate green, and they were as spotless as though the brush were just off them; on either side were two little brass guns, mounted on carriages, and they shone as freshly as though the sunlight were upon them; the running gear was everywhere neatly coiled away. The small caboose, with its smoking chimney, abaft the foremast; the length of windlass close in under the overlap of the short space of forecastle; the white longboat; the white scuttle-butt abreast of it; the little winch abaft the mainmast; the brass-lined circle of the wheel in the grasp of the sober, good-tempered-looking old fellow who had made one of the boat's crew; the two shapely clinker-built quarter-boats hanging at the davits abreast of the mizzen mast—these and much more seemed details of a miniature delicacy and finish, that entered with surprising effect into the fabric's general character of toy-like grace and elegance. On high, the white canvas soared in symmetrical spaces; but after the towering spires of the Indiaman, the main-yard of this little barque seemed within reach of the hand, and the tiny sky-sail that crowned the summit of the airy, snow-white, faintly-swelling cloths, no bigger than a lady's pocket-handkerchief.

'This is really a beautiful little ship, Miss Temple,' said I.

'I might be able to admire her from the deck of the *Countess Ida*,' she answered; 'but there must be happiness to enable me to find beauty, and I am not happy here.'

I searched the sea-line, but it was as bare and flawless as the rim of a brand-new guinea. The dull shadow of the morning still overspread the heavens; it was the same leaden sky, with here and there a little break of faintness, revealing some edge of apparently motionless cloud, and the ocean lay sallow beneath it, darker than it was for the pencilling of the ripples which wrinkled the wide expanse as they rode the long, light heave of the swell. There were some sailors at work in the waist on jobs, of which I forget the nature; I examined them attentively—they were within easy eyeshot; but though there was no lack of prejudice in my observation, I protest I could find nothing rascally in their appearance. They were all of them of the then familiar type of merchant seamen, as like to members of the crew of the Indiaman as one pea is to another; faces burnt by the sun and decorated with the usual assemblage of warts and moles, all of them of an unmistakably English cut—I am speaking of the five of them then visible—dressed in the rough apparel of the ocean, rude shirts revealing the

bare hairy breast, duck breeches with stains of oil and tar in them which there was no virtue in the scrubbing-brush and the lee-scuppers to remedy. Miss Temple, standing at my side, gazed at them.

'They have quite the look of cut-throats, I think,' said she.

'Well, now, to my fancy,' said I, 'they seem as honest a set of lively hearties as one could wish to sail with.'

'You merely say that to encourage me,' she exclaimed with a pout of vexation. 'Observe that man with the black beard—the one that is nearest to us. Could you figure a completer likeness of a pirate? I do not like his way of glancing at us out of the corner of his eyes. An honest sailor would stare boldly.'

I laughed, and then put on a face of apology.

'You will be smiling at these fears in a few days, I hope,' I exclaimed.

'Yes; but it is the meanwhile we have to think of,' she answered. 'Look at that man there'—meaning Mr. Lush; 'pray, tell me, Mr. Dugdale, that he has a very handsome, manly, good-tempered face.'

'No; I confess I don't like his appearance,' I answered, stealing a peep at the sulky-looking old dog, who continued to stare at the horizon with the immovability of a figure-head; 'yet inside of that hide there may be stowed away a very worthy member of society. A crab-apple is not a fruit to delight the eye; but I believe it is wholesome eating, though a trifle austere.'

At that moment the captain looked up from his book, and after taking a prolonged view of us, came in a slow walk to where we were standing, holding the volume in his hand.

'You have a charming little ship here, captain,' said I; 'I am exceedingly pleased with her.'

'Yes, sir; she's a handy craft. She will do her work,' he answered, sending his unwinking eyes with their sort of slow dead look along the deck.

'Which of those men down there are the convicts and mutineers?' began Miss Temple.

He whipped round upon her with a vehemence of manner that seemed a veritable fury of temper to the first seeing and hearing of it.

'For God Almighty's sake, not a word! D'ye want to see me a murdered man?' He twisted round on to me: 'Sir, you are to know nothing, if you please. This lady is to know nothing. I asked ye both in the cabin to be secret. God's death! if that man yonder had overheard her!' He stopped short, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at Lush.

Miss Temple was deadly pale. She had the same cowed air I had observed in her during our first few hours aboard the wreck.

'I am very sorry——' she muttered.

'For the love of God, mem!' he exclaimed in a whisper, putting his finger to his lips.

It was time to change the subject. I asked him how long he

had occupied in his passage from the Thames to this point, spoke of the light trade-wind and baffling airs we had encountered, told him once again of the privateering brig, asked him what he thought would be the chance of the corvette's cutter in such weather as she went adrift in, and in this way coaxed him out of his temper until I had got him to some posture of affability once more. I do not recollect the number of days he named as contained in his passage from London, but I can remember that it was a very swift run, proving daily totals which must have come very near to steam at times.

'Such a nimble keel as this should make you very easy, Miss Temple,' said I; 'why, here is a craft to sail round and round the *Countess Ida*. Even though we shouldn't pick her up, it is fifty to one that of all her passengers we two shall be the first to arrive in India.'

She fastened her eyes upon the deck with a countenance of incredulity and despair.

'I suppose your port will be St. Louis, sir?' said I.

He stared at me for some moments without speaking, and then slowly inclined his head in a single nod.

'I was never in that island,' I continued; 'but I presume we shall not be at a loss for a vessel to carry us to some part of India whence we may easily make our way to Bombay.'

His lack-lustre gaze seemed to grow deader as, after a pause, he exclaimed: 'There'll be some French skipper to make terms with, I don't doubt, for a passage north.'

'You talk, Mr. Dugdale,' said Miss Temple, 'as though you were well assured that we should not fall in with the Indiaman.'

'I am desirous of creating plenty of chances for ourselves,' said I; then gathering that this might not be a topic profitable to pursue in the presence of so singular a listener as Captain Braine, I again branched off. 'How many,' said I carelessly, 'go to a crew with you, captain?'

He answered leisurely: 'Thirteen as we now are, all told. There was fourteen afore Mr. Chicken died.'

'Well, even at that,' said I, 'a single watch should be able to reef down for you. I suppose'—here I sunk my voice—'that Mr. Lush yonder is now your chief mate?'

'No,' he replied, speaking stealthily; 'I'm my own chief mate. He's the ship's carpenter, and stands watch as second officer. But what are ye to do,' he proceeded, preserving his stealthy delivery, 'with a man whose education don't let him go no further than making a mark for his name?'

'Then, I take it, there is nobody aboard capable of navigating the vessel but yourself?'

'We'll talk about that presently,' said he with a singular look, and pointing with his finger to the deck.

I observed that Miss Temple narrowly watched him.

'Was Mr. Chicken a pretty good navigator?' said I.

He appeared to forget himself in thought, then with a slow emerging air, so to speak, and a steadfast, quite embarrassing stare, he responded: 'Chicken was acquainted with the use of the sextant. He likewise understood the meaning of Greenwich time. He couldn't take a star; but his reckonings was always close when he got them out of the sun. He'd been bred a collierman, and it took him some time to recover the loss of coasts and lee shores and lights. But he was a good sailor, and a religious man; and his death was a blow, sir.'

'Almost a pity that it wasn't Mr. Lush who was beckoned overboard,' said I. (The carpenter had now trudged aft, and was looking into the compass out of hearing.)

'Ah!' exclaimed Captain Braine, heaving a deep sigh and shaking his head: 'Lush's loss would have been my gain. One Chicken was worth all the Lushes that were ever afloat.—But hush, mem, if *you* please.'

'I shall certainly say nothing more about your crew,' exclaimed Miss Temple quickly and a little haughtily, while she slightly recoiled from the face he turned upon her.

'Have you any books aboard, Captain Braine?' said I, glancing at the volume he held in his hand. 'Any sort of amusement in the shape of chess or cards to help Miss Temple and myself to kill an hour or two from time to time?'

'There are some vollums in Chicken's cabin that belonged to him,' answered Captain Braine. 'I've read two or three of them. His cargo that way was usually edifying. There's Baxter's "Shove:" a good yarn; there's the "Pilgrim's Progress;" and there's the "Whole Dooty o' Man"—a bit leewardly; I couldn't fetch to windward in it myself. For my part, one book's enough for me; and excepting some vollums on navigation, it is the only work I goes to sea with.'

'The Bible!' I exclaimed, taking it from him. I was astonished and pleased. There seemed little for one to apprehend in the character of a man who could dedicate his leisure to the study of that Book, and I was sensible of an emotion of respect for the strange-looking, staring figure as I returned the little volume to him.

He dropped it into a side-pocket, and then most abruptly walked to the rail, took a long look at the weather and a long look aloft, trudged over to Mr. Lush, with whom he exchanged a sentence or two, and immediately afterwards disappeared down the companion.

For some time after this Miss Temple and I paced the deck together. There was much to talk about, and my companion found a deal to say about Captain Braine, whilst, as we walked, I would catch her taking furtive peeps at Mr. Lush, who, it was easy to see, had inspired her with aversion and fear, though the man had not offered to address a word to us, nor had he once looked our way, thirstily inquisitive as his stare had been whilst in the boat. I

could not help contrasting her behaviour now with what I recollected of it aboard the *Countess Ida*. She had put her hand into my arm, and the intimacy of our association in this way might well have suggested an affianced pair. She talked eagerly and with all the passion of the many emotions which rose in her with her references, to our situation, to her aunt, to the chance of our sighting the Indiaman, and the like; and I don't doubt that the men who watched us from the fore-part of the vessel put us down either as husband and wife or a betrothed couple.

And all this in three days! Three days ago she could hardly bring herself to speak or even to look at me; and now fortune had contrived that she should have no other companion, that she should be locked up with me alone in a dismasted hull, and then be brought, always with me at her side, into a vessel where, as she believed, there was much more to fill us with alarm than in the worst of the conditions which entered into our existence aboard the wreck! Again and again she would ask, with her dark and glowing eyes bent with an expression of despair upon my face, when it was to end and how it was to end; and these questions my heart would echo as I gazed at the cold and alarmed beauty of her face, but with a very different meaning from what she attached to the inquiries.

At last she grew weary of walking, and I took her below and sat with her awhile on a cushioned locker. It was now drawing on to four o'clock in the afternoon; the breeze quiet, the sky in shadow, the sea very smooth save for the soft undulation of the swell, which pleasantly and soothingly cradled the little fabric as she slipped through it, of a milky white from water-line to truck, to the impulse of her wide overhanging pinions. After a bit, I observed a heaviness in the lids of my companion, and urged her to lie down and take some rest. She consented; and I lingered at her side until sleep overcame her, and then I stood for awhile surveying with deep admiration the calm sweetness of her face, into which had stolen the tenderness of the unconscious woman, softening down the haughty arching of eyebrow, unbending the imperious set of the mouth. It was as though her spirit clad in her own beauty was revealed to me disrobed of all the trappings of the waking humours. I could have knelt by her side, and in that posture have watched her for an hour. Can it be, thought I, as I crept softly to the cuddy door, that I am in love with her?

I leisurely filled my pipe from the hunk of tobacco I had met with in the wreck, taking, whilst I did so, as I stood on the quarter-deck, a good steady look at such of the sailors as were about, though I contrived an idly curious manner, and directed my eyes as often at the barque's furniture as at the seamen. After I had been on the poop a few minutes, Mr. Lush left it to go forward; and with my pipe betwixt my teeth, I lounged over to the binnacle to see how the ship headed. The man who grasped the spokes was the honest-faced fellow I had before noticed at the wheel; he,

I mean, of the minute eyes and whiskers joined at his throat, who had addressed me in the boat whilst we lay alongside the hull. I noticed that he seemed to stir a little uneasily as I approached, as though nervously meditating a speech, and I had scarcely glanced into the compass bowl when he exclaimed: 'I beg your pardon, sir.'

I looked at him.

'The noose,' said he, 'came forrads afore I lay aft for this here trick that the ship you came out of and lost sight of was the *Countess Ida*.'

'That is so,' I exclaimed.

'Might I make so bold,' he continued, slightly moving the wheel, and bringing his specks of eyes into a squint over my head as he sent a glance at the tiny skysail pulling under the main truck, 'as to inquire if so be that the bo'sun of that ship was a man named Smallridge?'

'Yes, Smallridge; that was the boatswain's name,' I replied, warming up to the mere reference to that hearty sailor.

'Well,' said he, 'I heerd that he was agoing bo'sun in that ship, and I was pretty nigh signing for her myself, only that her date of sailing didn't give me quite long enough ashore. And how *is* Mr. Smallridge, sir?'

'Very well indeed,' said I.

'I've got a perticler respect for Mr. Smallridge,' he continued; 'he kep' company with my sister for some time, and would ha' married her, but she tailed on to a sojer whilst he was away, prefarring the lobster to the shellback, sir. Well, I'm glad to larn that he's hearty, I'm sure. If so be as we should fall in with the *Countess Ida*, and put you aboard without my seeing of Mr. Smallridge, I'd take it werry kind, sir, if you'd give him Joe Wetherly's respects.'

'I certainly will,' said I with alacrity; 'but I fear there is little chance of our meeting with the Indiaman.'

'Well, there's no telling,' he exclaimed; 'but she'll have to be right in this here barque's road, supposing her to be ahead; and if we should pass her in the dark, why, then, good-night! for she's like grease in the water is this here *Lady Blanche*.'

'Smallridge and I were very good friends. He'd been a sailor in the ship I was afterwards midshipman in.'

'Oh, indeed,' cried he. 'And so *you* was at sea, sir?'

I was about to reply, designing to lead him on into answering certain questions I had in my mind concerning the captain and crew of the barque, when Mr. Lush came up the poop ladder; so, knowing the etiquette, I hauled off, but with the full intention of sounding Mr. Joe Weatherly at large when an opportunity should offer.

CHAPTER XXV

I KEEP A LOOKOUT

I SLIPPED half-way down the little companion ladder to take a peep at Miss Temple, and on observing her to be resting quietly, I returned, and after lighting my pipe anew, stepped over to Mr. Lush, who was employed in cutting off a piece of tobacco from a black cake to serve him as a quid.

'It is not often hereabouts,' said I, by way of starting a conversation, 'that one has a sky like that all day long overhanging one's mastheads.'

'No,' said he; but it's better than the roasting sun;' and he opened his large mouth to receive the cube of tobacco into the hollow of his cheek, whilst he eyed the sky askant, as though in recognition of it as a subject of talk.

'Did you fall in with the smother that ended in the lady and I being stranded aboard the wreck?' I inquired.

'No; there's been ne'er a smother with us.'

'The death of Mr. Chicken,' said I, 'must have been a blow, seeing that the barque carried but a couple of mates.'

'How many mates do a ship of this size want?' said he, without looking at me and slowly masticating.

'Well, she has only one now, anyway,' said I.

'No; she ain't got even one,' he exclaimed, with the manner of an ill-tempered man who only listens for the sake of contradiction and argument.

'Are not *you* second mate?' I asked.

'Not I,' he replied with a gruff laugh. 'They calls me second mate, and I keeps watch and watch with the capt'n as if I *was* second mate; but what I'm signed for is carpenter, and carpenter I be, and there's nothen more to be made out of me than that, and I don't care who the bloomin' blazes hears me say it.'

He drew to the rail by a step and expectorated violently over it. I was too anxious for information about this little ship and her crew to suffer my curiosity to be hindered by the man's rough, coarse, ill-natured speech and demeanour.

'I was wondering where you took your meals,' said I. 'I now understand. You live forward?' He gave me a surly nod. 'But not in the forecastle?'

'Where else? Ain't the fok'sle good enough for me?'

'But does not association of that sort weaken your control over the men?'

'*I've* got no control, and don't want none. The men 'll run if I sing out. And what more's to be expected of sailors?'

'It seems queer, though,' said I, 'since you undertake the work of a second-mate, that you shouldn't live aft. It must have been lonely eating for the skipper after Mr. Chicken died?'

'I did live aft afore Mr. Chicken died,' he exclaimed, biting

his tobacco with temper, whilst his weather-stained face gathered a new shade of duskiness to the mounting of the blood into his head; 'and then when the capt'n and me comes to be alone, he tarns to and finds out that I ain't choice enough to sit down with—says I ain't got the art of perlite eatin', calls me a hog to my face, and tells me that my snout's for the mess kid and not for knives and forks and crockery. Him!' He turned his face to the rail and spat again, and looked at me with an expression of anger, but checked himself with violence, and pushed his hands into his breeches pockets with an irritable motion of his whole frame.

I considered that enough had been said; and though I had gained but little information, it was at least made clear to me that there was no love lost between Captain Braine and Mr. Lush. But further conversation would have been rendered impossible in any case, for just then a man struck eight bells on the main deck, and a minute or two later the wheel was relieved, the captain arrived, and the carpenter went forward in a round-backed sulky walk, his legs bowed, his muscular arms hanging up and down without a swing, each bunch of his fingers curled like fish-hooks.

I had talked enough, and was weary of standing and walking; so, when I spied the skipper, I slipped off the poop and seated myself on a bench abreast of my sleeping companion, where I remained for half an hour, often gazing at her, my mind very busy with a hundred thoughts, foremost amongst which was the shuddering recollection of our late experiences and narrow escape, and deep thankfulness to God for His merciful preservation of us. The entrance of the captain's servant—a young fellow named Wilkins, to be hereafter so called: a memorable figure in this startling eventful passage of my life which I am endeavouring to relate: a veal-faced, red-headed, shambling fellow of some two-and-twenty years, with white eyebrows and lashes, and a dim blue eye—the entrance, I say, of this man with a tray of tea-things aroused Miss Temple, who, after a bewildered stare at me, smiled, and sat upright.

'There is always something new now,' she exclaimed, 'to look at when I open my eyes after sleeping. Yesterday it was the wreck; to-day it is this ship. What will it be to-morrow? Is there anything in sight, Mr. Dugdale?'

'There was nothing when I left the deck half an hour ago,' said I.

She had awakened with a slight flush of sleep in her face that greatly enriched her eyes; but the delicate glow quickly faded; she was speedily colourless as alabaster. She smoothed her hair and put on her hat, that she had removed when she lay down.

'It is strange,' she exclaimed in a low voice, 'I should not seem able to endure feeling that I am not in a condition to instantly leave this vessel. It was so with me in the wreck. Even without my hat, I feel unready; and then, again, there is the sense of not being exactly as I was when I left the *Countess Ida*.'

The captain called through the skylight: 'Wilkins, bring me some tea and a biscuit up here.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'Pray,' said I, 'when and where does the captain dine?'

'I took his dinner to his cabin,' responded the young fellow; 'he mostly eats there. But now you're here, I allow he'll be a-jining of you.'

'This is no meal for you, Miss Temple,' said I, with a glance at the old teapot and the small plate of biscuits which furnished out the repast. 'No milk—brown sugar—no butter, of course!' Wilkins grinned whilst he poured out some tea into a cup. 'You've had nothing to eat since we first came aboard.'

'I want nothing,' she answered.

'Well, then, *I* do,' said I. 'Captain Braine is quite right. Shipwreck doesn't impair the appetite.'

'There'll be supper at seven, sir,' said Wilkins.

'And what do you call supper?' I inquired.

'Why,' answered the fellow, 'there'll be the beef ye had this morning, piccalillis, bottled stout, biscuit after this here pattern, and cold currant dumplings.'

He then went up the companion steps with some biscuit and tea for the captain. I laughed out.

'Not so good as the Indiaman's dinner-table, Miss Temple, but better than the hull's entertainment. We must wait till supper's served. Meanwhile, I'll blunt my appetite on a biscuit. Will you give me a cup of tea?'

It was genuine forecastle liquor, such as might have been boiled in a copper, of the hue of ink, and full of fragments of stalk. However, the mere looking at it was something to do, and we sat toying with our cups, making-pretend, as it were, to be drinking tea and talking,

'I wonder,' I exclaimed in the course of our conversation, 'whether the cutter was picked up by one of the ships? If she lost both of them, will she have lived in the weather that followed? Anyway, the corvette is certain to make a long hunt for her, with the hope also of falling in with the Indiaman, for Sir Edward will think it possible that Keeling has his men aboard, and will want to make sure. I fear this business of the cutter may have led to such manœuvring on the part of the two ships as must render our falling-in with one or the other of them very unlikely.'

'Oh, why do you say that?' she cried.

'It is but a surmise,' said I; 'anyhow, I heartily hope the cutter *has* been picked up, if only for Colledge's sake. The sudden loss of the lieutenant will have dreadfully scared him.'

'I earnestly wish that Mr. Colledge may have been saved,' said she with a faint glitter of temper in her gaze: 'but I could wish ten times more earnestly that he had never been born, or that he had sailed in any other ship than the *Countess Ida*; for then I should not be here.'

'Your aunt endeavoured to dissuade you.'

'She did: and I am rightly served for not obeying her.'

'You are very high-spirited, Miss Temple; it is your nature, and you cannot help yourself. You are a young lady to insist upon having your own way, and you always get it.'

'Mr. Dugdale, you are too young to lecture me.'

'How old do you think I am?' said I.

'Oh, about six-and-twenty,' she answered with a slight incurious run of her eyes over me that recalled her manner in the Indiaman.

'Well, if I am,' said I, 'it is a good solid age to achieve. There is room for enough experiences in six-and-twenty years to enable a young man to utter several very truthful observations to high-spirited young ladies who insist upon having their way, and then quarrel with everybody because their way is not exactly the road they wish to tread.'

She slightly knitted her fair brows and looked at me fixedly.

'Mr. Dugdale,' said she, 'you would not have dared to talk to me like this on board the *Countess Ida*.'

'I was afraid of you there.'

'You *respected* me there, you mean, and now, because——' She came to a stop, with a little quivering at the extremities of her mouth.

'I am no longer afraid of you, or, rather, I no longer respect you because you happen to be in this particular situation, which needs no explanation whatever: that is, I suppose, what you wish to say. But you misjudge me indeed. I was afraid of you on board the Indiaman, but I did not respect you; nay, my aversion was as cordial as could be possibly imagined in a man who thought you then, as he thinks you still, the handsomest woman he has ever seen in his life, or could ever have dreamt of. But that aversion is passing,' I continued, watching with delight her marvellous gaze of astonishment and the warm flush that had overspread her face. 'I am discovering that much of what excited my dislike and regret aboard the Indiaman is artificial, an insincerity in you. This afternoon, whilst you slept, I sat near you for half an hour, gazing at you. All expression of haughtiness had faded from your mouth: your countenance wore an air of exquisite placidity, of gentle kindness, of tender good nature. In short, Miss Temple, I saw you as you are, as your good angel knows you to be, as you have it in your power to appear.' I sprang to my feet. 'How shall we kill the blessed hours that lie before us? Only think, it is barely five o'clock.'

She gazed at me with an amazement that seemed to render her speechless; her face was on fire, and her throat blushed to where the collar of her dress circled it. 'It will not do,' I continued, 'to attempt to murder time by talking, or it will come to your killing me instead of the hours. I'll go and overhaul the late Mr. Chicken's bedroom, or, rather, his effects. There *may* be something to interest. Even the mouldiest backgammon board would be

worth a million ;' and I made for the little hatch that conducted to our sleeping berths, leaving her motionless at the table.

Come, thought I, as I dropped into the 'tween-decks, a short spell of loneliness will do you good, my haughty beauty, by making you realise how it would be with you were you actually alone. This is the first of the homely thrusts I have been preparing for you, and I will not spare you less as I grow to love you more, taking my chance of your abhorring me, though it may not come to *that* either.

I peeped into the berth that had been prepared for her, and found all the odds and ends which had encumbered it gone ; there was a clean mattress on the bunk, and on top of it an old but comely rug and a couple of shawls ; a small looking-glass dangled near the porthole. But what an interior for this delicately nurtured, high and mighty young lady of quality to lie in ! No carpet, no chest of drawers, nothing beyond the looking-glass and a tin dish for washing in ; in short, a mere marine cell, as like as might be to any little whitewashed room with grated window ashore in which a policeman would lock up a pickpocket !

I entered my own berth. The boatswain's and sailmaker's stores were not here, and I found a 'clean hold,' as a sailor might say. In fact, all Chicken's traps being about, caused the berth to present a much more hospitable aspect than the adjacent one afforded. I examined the books, but found most of them to consist of religious literature, as the captain had said, and the rest of them works on the nautical life. Though it was hard to reconcile a fancy of cards with the late Mr. Chicken's character as portrayed by the skipper, I yet looked into a couple of chests in the hope of meeting with a pack ; but neither cards nor any species of object calculated to divert did I come across ; and growing weary of hunting, I returned to the cuddy.

I perceived or imagined an air of reproach in Miss Temple ; but she had mastered her temper and astonishment.

'There is nothing belonging to the late Mr. Chicken to entertain us,' said I.

'It surely does not signify, Mr. Dugdale. Do you suppose that I have the heart to play at cards or chess ? Is not there more wind than there was ? I will ask you to take me on deck. Something may be in sight, and it will not be dark for some time yet.'

I gave her my hand, and helped her up the little ladder. There was more wind, as she had said ; the skysails had been furled and a studding-sail or two hauled down, and the little barque, with her yards almost square, was sweeping swiftly over the smooth waters, slightly heeling from side to side as she went. The foam in yeasty bubbles and soft cream-hued clouds went spinning and writhing from her bows into her wake, that ran like a path of coral sand over the darkling waters, now complexioned into lividness by the gloomy plain of vaporous sky. The crew were on the forecastle—it was well into the first dog-watch—lounging, sitting, yarning, and

smoking. Amidst them I noticed Mr. Lush, leaning against the rail with a short sooty pipe in his mouth, the bowl of which was inverted. He was in his shirt sleeves, and he reclined with his arms folded upon his breast, apparently listening, in that dogged posture, to one of the sailors, who was reciting something with outstretched arm and a long forefinger, with which he seemed to be figuring diagrams upon the air. Upon the slope of the starboard cathead, coming into the deck, sat my friend Joe Wetherly, with a pair of thick-rimmed spectacles on his nose; he pored on a book with moving lips, from which he would expel at intervals great clouds of smoke through a pipe betwixt his teeth. So small was the barque, so seemingly close at hand the forecastle to the break of the poop, that even such minute details as these were perfectly visible to me.

Captain Braine stood near the wheel. He continuously stared at us, but did not shift his attitude nor offer to address us. I swept the sea-line, but to no purpose.

'How sickeningly wearisome has that bare horizon grown to me!' exclaimed Miss Temple, with a shuddering sigh; 'it has just the sort of monotony that would speedily drive me crazy, I am sure; not the wearisomeness of four walls, nor the tiresomeness of a single eternal glimpse of unchanging country to be had through a window; no! there is a mockery in it which you do not find in the most insipid, colourless scene on land. It is not, and still it always *is*, the same. It recedes to your pursuit, yet it is unalterable, and how cruelly barren is it of suggestions!'

'Yet a sight of the Indiaman,' said I, 'should develop whatever of the picturesque may be hidden in that tiresome girdle.'

'Ah, yes!' she answered; 'but we are now running away from our chances. How swiftly this boat sails! If the Indiaman is behind us we shall see no more of her.'

'Do not let us depress each other with talk of this kind,' said I; 'let me give you my arm, and we will stroll a little.'

We had been on deck about twenty minutes, when the captain, who had continued to steadfastly gaze at us in a most extraordinary ruminating way, crossed the deck.

'Pray, sir,' said he, 'could I trust you to keep a lookout for me if I went below for a short spell?'

'I will do so with pleasure.'

'D'ye know what orders to give, if anything requiring orders should happen?'

Why,' said I, smiling, 'there are a good many orders going at sea, you know, captain. Figure a situation, and I will see if I can recollect the routine.'

He stared at me musingly with his dead black eyes, and then said: 'Well, suppose the breeze freshens with a dark look to wind'ard, and I'm below and asleep, and have left ye no instructions; what would you do?'

'Call you,' said I.

'And quite right, too,' he cried with a vehement nod of approval, and a glance at Miss Temple, as if he would have her participate in his satisfaction. 'But put me out of the question, and allow that you've got to act for yourself.'

'Why, Captain Braine,' I exclaimed, 'though my time at sea was brief, I am no longshoreman. Such a question as yours means merely the first letter in the marine alphabet.'

'I ain't so sure of that,' said he, with his fixed regard.

'I admit,' continued I, 'that I have never been shipmate with a fore-and-aft rigged mizzenmast; but if it's merely a question of shortening sail, why, what else under the moon is to be done than to take in your studdingsails and clew up your royals and haul down your flying jib, and then let go your foretopgallant halliards, and haul down your light staysails'—and so I rambled on, winding up with, 'I am leaving your after-canvas untouched, because it is already in, you see; whilst as to your jibs and staysails, I assume of course that they are set.'

He lifted his hand. 'Thank'ee,' said he; 'I shan't be long;' and down he went.

'You will surely believe *now* that he is mad!' said Miss Temple with anxiety, but softly, for the fellow at the wheel stood near, and I had seen a grin crumple up his features to the skipper's question.

'He may want me to serve him as a mate,' said I, laughing.

'You will do nothing of the kind, I hope,' she exclaimed, as we fell to pacing the deck afresh.

'I will do anything that may help me to see you safe,' said I.

'But cannot you perceive, Mr. Dugdale, that if he believes you fit to serve him as a mate, as you call it, he may prevent you from leaving his ship by declining to communicate with passing vessels?'

'That is true,' said I.

'I am certain,' she cried, squeezing my arm in the energy of her emotion, 'that he has some design in his mind to make you serve him. Why should he have teased you when we came, poor miserable creatures! fresh from the wreck, with inquiries about your knowledge of navigation? Oh, beware of him! He may not be quite mad, but he may be as wicked as the worst of his men.'

'We must wait,' said I, for her conjectures were quite reasonable enough to prove disturbing. 'But, after all,' I cried, brightening up to the new idea that possessed me, 'if we are to sail to the Mauritius with him ——'

'No!' she exclaimed; 'that is not to be dreamt of.'

'Yet listen, I entreat you. If it is our uncomfortable doom to remain in this barque until she reaches her port, I do not know but that the captain would be very honestly in the right in expecting me to work my passage—that is to say, to help him by keeping a lookout, and by serving him in other ways which may be possible to me.'

'Do not dream of sailing to the Mauritius!' she cried impetuously; 'we must either soon meet with the Indiaman or return home.'

I could not forbear a smile at her imperious *we*, as though whatever she did I must do.

'Ah, that is what we want,' I exclaimed; 'but then if we don't fall in with the Indiaman nor with a vessel homeward bound ——'

'Absurd! Dozens of ships are to be met with every day sailing home to England from some part or other of the world. The idea of remaining in this vessel is not to be entertained for an instant. It would be intolerable enough for me even to make the comparatively short passage home, destitute as I am of everything; but to leisurely proceed *all* the way to the Mauritius—— Oh, be very careful, Mr. Dugdale. I beg you not to know anything at all about navigation and the duties of a sailor.'

'I can't do that,' I answered; 'I have loaded my gun and must stick to it; but I promise you I will put no more shot in it.'

She eyed me with great impatience and warmth, as though provoked by my answer: but she held her peace, and presently our conversation went to other matters.

Shortly before six o'clock the sky cleared somewhat to windward. The wide pall of leaden cloud lifted there, as though it were some huge carpet a corner of which was being rolled up, and there looked to flow a very lagoon of pure blue ether, moist and rich with the evening shadow, into the space betwixt the rim of the sea and the edge of the cloud. A clearer, more penetrating light broadened out; and going to the companion hatch, I took the telescope that lay in brackets there and carefully searched the horizon. But the sea washed bare to the sky on all sides.

I did not observe that the men gathered together on the forecastle seemed to notice the captain's absence, though I expected they would come to stare a bit when the fellow who stood at the wheel should go forward and tell them that I had been acting as mate of the watch. For my part this queer duty coming upon me made the whole experience more wild and improbable to my imagination than had been any other feature of it since we quitted the Indiaman. Never was there such a forcing of adventures, as it were, upon a man. It was like dreaming to reflect that a little time ago I was a passenger, an easy-going, smoking, drinking, chess-playing young fellow, without a care, with plenty of clothes and money enough in my cabin, and that now I was a half-starved, shipwrecked wretch, without the value of a straw in the shape of possessions, outside of what I stood up in and had in my pockets, keeping a lookout as though, faith, I was some poor, struggling, hungry second-mate, newly enlarged from an odious term of apprenticeship! like dreaming, I say, to think that a little time ago the young lady by my side was a reserved, disdainful creature, with scarcely a word betwixt her lips to throw at me, and that now she could not speak of her future without making me a sharer in it, that she could not see enough of me, nor have my arm too close for her hand; whilst in point of destitution she, the most richly clad of the Indiaman's lady passengers, she, who had seemed

to me to appear in a new dress nearly every day, was out and away more beggared than I; for so far as I was concerned there was always the barque's slop chest to come upon; or, failing that, there would be jackets and breeches and 'housewives' enough forward to serve my turn if the push grew severe; whereas Miss Temple was as badly off as if she had been cast away upon a desert island!

CHAPTER XXVI

I AM QUESTIONED

THE captain did not again return on deck. At six o'clock Mr. Lush's white jacket was forked up to him through the forecastle hatch: he slipped it on and came aft to relieve the watch; but though he looked about a little for the skipper, I could not find in his wooden face that he made anything of not perceiving him. By seven o'clock the sky had cleared; the wide stretch of vapour which had all day long obscured the sky had settled away down beyond the southern rim, and the soft violet of the tropic evening heaven was made beautiful by spaces at wide intervals of a delicate filigree-work of white cloud, dainty and fine to the eye as frost on a meadow. The setting sun glowed in the west like a golden target, rayless, palpitating, and a cone-shaped wake of flame hung under him. There was a pleasant whipping of wind over the sea, a merry air that whitened the heads of the ripples, and it blew sweet and warm.

Lush had loosed the skysails again and sent the royal studding-sails up, and the barque went nimbly floating through it in the resemblance of some golden-tinctured fabric of silver hull and sails of cloth of silver; indeed, from the point of view of the space of deck abaft the wheel, she showed like some fairy creation in that atmosphere that was brimful of scarlet light, and upon that sapphire plain whose tender long-drawn undulations seemed to wave a faint golden hue through the blue of the brine, as though there were dyes of a westering sun-colour rising from the heart of the deep, and then subsiding.

On looking through the skylight I perceived Wilkins placing supper on the table. This was an unusual meal at sea, at least aboard of a homely trader of the pattern of the *Lady Blanche*, and was a distinct illustration in its way, to my recollections of seafaring life, of the odd character of the man who commanded the barque. He came out of his cabin as we seated ourselves, giving Miss Temple a grotesque bow before taking his place.

'Sorry, mem,' said he, casting his slow eye over the table, 'that there's nothing choicer in the way of victuals to offer you. I find that the wine brought aboard from the wreck is a middling good quality of liquor, and it is to be saved for you, mem. Wilkins, open a bottle, and give it to the lady. Pity that shore-

going folks who take interest in the nautical calling don't turn to and invent something better for the likes of me than salt pork and beef and biscuit, and peas which are only fit to load a blunderbuss with. There have been times when a singular longing's come upon me for a cut of prime sirloin and a floury potato, as Jack says. But the sea-life's a hard calling, look at it from which end of the ship ye may. How did you get on in your watch on deck, Mr. Dugdale?' he added with a gaunt smile, in which I could not distinguish the least complexion of mirth.

'There was nothing to be done,' said I, working away at a piece of salt beef, for I was exceedingly hungry.

'But ye'd have known what to do if there had been?' said he.

Miss Temple's glance admonished me to be wary.

'Oh, I am no sailor,' said I, 'in the sense that you and Mr. Lush are sailors.'

'Not Mr. Lush!' he cried, elevating his fore-finger and staring hard at me past it. 'Mr. Lush, as you term him, is a hog on two legs. Let him go on all fours, and there's ne'er an old sow under a longboat that wouldn't take him to her heart as one of her long-lost children. Such manners, mem!' he continued, addressing Miss Temple, whilst with upturned eyes and raised hands he counterfeited an air of disgust; 'when he ate, you could hear the smack of his lips fore and aft. He'd make nothing of laying hold of a bit of cold beef and gnawing upon it as a dawg might, head first on one side and then on t'other; and you'd find yourself listening to hear him growl, if you looked at him. And then his language! I've been eating by myself pretty nigh since Chicken died, but it's entertainment for me to have company;' and he bestowed another bow upon each of us.

'You will not find the manners of a nobleman in a plain ship's carpenter,' said I, thankful to believe that he had forgotten the subject of my sea-going qualifications. But I was mistaken. He gazed at me with a steadfastness that was absolutely confusing, whilst he seemed lost in deep thought, then said:

'I'm not going to regard you, Mr. Dugdale, as a tip-top sailor, of course. Ye've knocked off too long; but it'll all come back very soon.'

'Mr. Dugdale was at sea for only two years,' said Miss Temple. 'It would be unreasonable to expect anyone to know much of a calling in that time.'

'Don't you believe *that*, mem,' he exclaimed. 'After twelve months of it, there was but little left for me to larn—proper, I mean, to fit me to sarve as able seaman aboard anything afloat, from a hoy to a line-of-battle ship. What don't ye know now, Mr. Dugdale?'

He somewhat softened his voice as he said this, and a queer sort of yearning expression entered his unwinking stare.

'Oh, much, captain, much,' I answered smiling, yet feeling somewhat bothered betwixt these questions and Miss Temple's glances.

'You could put a ship about, I suppose?'

'Well, I might do that,' I replied; 'but there would be a chance of my getting her into irons, though.'

'You'd be able to know when to shorten sail anyway, and what orders to give. You told me ye could take a star?'

'Did I?' I exclaimed.

'Certainly you did, sir,' he cried.

'I do not recollect,' said Miss Temple.

'Ha!' he exclaimed, with another of his mirthless grins, 'the lady's afraid of your knowing too much, sir. I don't mean no offence, but there's a forecastle saying that all the male monkeys'ud talk if it wasn't for their sweethearts, who advise them to hold their jaw lest they should be put upon.'

Miss Temple's face changed into stone, after one withering glance at the man, whose countenance remained distorted with a smile.

'Some of Jack's sayings are first class,' he went on. 'Yes, ye told me you could take a star. Can you find the latitude by double altitudes?'

'A few trials would recall the trick, I daresay,' I answered.

'And of course you know how to find the longitude by lunar observations?'

'Pray excuse me, Captain Braine,' said I; 'but what, may I inquire, is your motive in asking these questions?'

He eyed me fixedly for some moments, and then silently nodded his head three or four times. Miss Temple seemed to shrink slightly as she watched him.

'Mr. Dugdale,' said he very slowly, 'on your giving me to understand that you had sarved aboard an Indiaman, I was willing to receive you and the lady aboard my ship. When you came aboard, you told me that you understood navigation. Didn't ye?'

I felt the blood in my cheek as I answered: 'I have some recollection of speaking to that effect.'

'Then why d'ye want to go and try to make out *now* that ye know nothing about it?'

'I am trying to do nothing of the kind,' said I, assuming an air of dignity and resentment, though I feared it was good for very little. 'You have questioned me, sir, and now I ask *you* a question. I have a right to an answer, seeing how you expect that I should rapidly and fluently reply to you.'

'I'll be talking to you afore long,' he said, bestowing another succession of dark mysterious nods upon me.

'Captain Braine,' cried Miss Temple, breaking with an air of consternation out of the cold, contemptuous resentment that had made marble of her face, 'you have rescued us from a condition of dreadful distress, and I have your promise that you will not lose an opportunity to transfer us to the first ship you meet that is homeward bound, providing we do not shortly fall in with the *Countess Ida*.'

'I ha'n't broke my promise yet, have I?' he replied, rounding slowly upon her and staring.

'I can only repeat,' she continued, preserving her expression of dismay, 'that any sum of money you may choose to ask——'

'I know all about that, mem,' he interrupted, but not offensively, and with a gesture that was almost bland. He then leisurely turned to me. 'You gave me to believe this morning, sir, that you was acquainted with navigation?'

'And what then?' I exclaimed impatiently.

'I hope that you didn't deceive me,' he said with a dark look.

'You shall have full truth when I know your motive in examining me in this fashion,' said I hotly, 'and not before.'

But immediately after I had spoken I was sensible of my folly in losing my temper. Talk as we might, vapour as we would, we were in this man's power: in the power of a man who was absolutely unintelligible as a character whether sane or mad, and the girl's and my own safety might wholly depend upon our judgment and tact. He gazed at me with eyes whose expression seemed to grow more and more malignant, though, God knows, this might have been my fancy, since I was in the humour at the moment to figure all things very blackly.

'Understand me,' I exclaimed, wholly changing my manner, and speaking in a softened tone; 'if I can be of service to you in any direction, you have but to command me. I owe you my own and this lady's life; and though it is an obligation beyond my power of discharging in full, yet it must be my duty and happiness to diminish it in any direction I am equal to.'

'We will before long talk together, sir,' said he, and then fell silent, nor did he again open his lips during the seven or eight minutes in which we continued sitting together at that table.

I was exceedingly puzzled and troubled by what had passed. What did this captain mean by his dark mysterious nods, by his saying that he would talk to me presently, by his insistence in ascertaining the extent of my nautical knowledge? It was possible, indeed, that being the only navigator aboard his vessel, he might consider himself in serious need of some one to take his place if he should fall sick. But his behaviour was scarcely reconcilable with this plain clear want, and it seemed certain that there was more going to his speech and manner than the desire that I should fill the part of mate to him.

It was a fair, warm, delightful night, rich with stars, and soothing with the dew-sweetened wind that blew with steady freshness over the quarter, running the pale shape of the barque over the dark waters, as though she were some wreath of mist that must presently dissolve. Miss Temple and I, sometimes walking, sometimes sitting on the skylight, held to the deck till a late hour. She abhorred the thought of withdrawing to the cabin allotted to her; and short as my sleep had been since the hour of my quitting the Indiaman's side, I was as little willing as she to quit the silence and

coolness and beauty of the open night for the confinement of a small hot berth.

The captain had charge of the deck from eight to twelve; but he only once approached us to say that a lantern containing an end of candle had been placed in each of our berths; 'and I will ask you both,' he added, 'to mind your fire, for we're full up with dry light goods in the steerage.' He then returned to the side of the deck he had crossed from, and did not again offer to approach us.

You will suppose that the girl and I could talk of nothing but the captain's intentions, the probable condition of his intellect, and the like.

'He may refuse to part with me,' said I, 'and yet be perfectly willing to send you on board of the first homeward-bound ship we sight. What then, Miss Temple?'

'I could not travel alone. It is not endurable that such a man as Captain Braine should compel you, against your wishes, to remain with him! How could he do so? How could he compel you to take a star, as he calls it, whatever that may mean; and to keep watch?' She sighed deeply. 'Alas! my language is fast becoming that of the common sailor. To think of me talking to you about taking a star and keeping watch!'

'And why not? Jack's is a noble tongue. Omit the oaths, and there is no dialect more swelling and poetic than that of the sea.'

'I detest it because it is forced upon me. An odious and dreadful experience obliges me to think and speak in it. Otherwise, I might rather like it. But tell me now, Mr. Dugdale, surely this captain could not compel you to remain with him?'

This led to a deal of talk. I did my utmost to reassure her; I exhorted her to bear in mind that whilst we were on board the barque, we were literally at the mercy of the skipper, who, down to the present moment, had certainly treated us with great humanity, though his behaviour and conversation in the main were undeniably of a lunatic sort. I bitterly condemned myself for losing my temper, and I entreated her to be patient, to control all resentment that the man might excite by purposed or involuntary insult, not to doubt that he would put her on board a ship proceeding home, and to leave me to play a part of my own that should keep us together.

'For,' said I, 'since fate, cruel to you, but not to me, Miss Temple, has placed you so far in my keeping, I must be jealous of all interference down to the very termination of our adventure.'

'I wish for no other companion,' she exclaimed in a low voice; 'my mother will thank you, Mr. Dugdale.'

'And, please God, your mother shall,' said I, 'trifling as may be my claims upon her gratitude. But, however my merits may turn out before we again sight Old England, I shall be abundantly satisfied if I believe that you think of me with more kindness than you did on board the *Countess Ida*.'

'Mr. Dugdale, I thought of no one on board the *Countess Ida*.

But let us avoid that subject—you have already been very plain-spoken.'

She ceased. I made no answer, and for some time we paced the deck in silence, harking then back again to the old topic of the captain's intentions, the whereabouts of the Indiaman, and so on, and so on. By-and-by I looked at my watch; the dial-plate showed clearly by the starlight. It was eleven o'clock; and as I looked the ship's bell rang out six chimes, which came floating down again in echoes out of the tremorless pallid concavities on high. Miss Temple was still most reluctant to leave the deck.

'I am thinking of Mr. Chicken,' she exclaimed.

'Chicken's ghost, like a hen's egg, is laid,' said I. 'Besides, what remains of him will be all about my bunk.'

'Oh for the Indiaman's saloon,' she cried, 'for my dear aunt, for old Captain Keeling! How welcome would be a sight of even the most intolerable of the passengers, say Mr. Johnson; even that horrid little creature with the eye-glass, Miss Hudson's admirer.'

'I fear I am tolerated for the same reason that would render Mr. Johnson endurable to you.'

'No!' she answered quickly and warmly; 'you are incessantly personal. I do not like it.'

'Suffer me to escort you to your cabin?'

She lingered yet, turning her face to the skies.

'How rich are those stars! Such lovely jewels are never to be seen in the English heavens. Mark how the meteors score the dark spaces between the lights with scars and paths of diamond dust! Oh that some gigantic shadowy finger would shape itself up there pointing downwards, to let us know where the *Countess Ida* is.'

She rose from the skylight with a long tremulous sigh, and passed her hand through my arm that I might conduct her below. For an instant I hung in the wind.

'Why do you wait? I am now ready,' said she.

'I am debating within myself whether I should offer to stand watch to-night—the captain might expect me to do so.'

'I do believe you desire that I should think you as mad as he is,' she exclaimed, exerting pressure enough on my arm to start me towards the poop-ladder; 'you shall do nothing of the sort with my consent. If you wish to resume your old vocation, Mr. Dugdale, pray wait until this adventure is ended.'

'Anyway, we must bid him good-night,' said I; and with that I called out to him. He answered: 'Good-night, Mr. Dugdale; good-night to you, mem. If there's anything a-missing which the *Lady Blanche* can supply let me know, and you shall have it.'

'You're extremely good, and we're very much obliged to you,' said I.

'Good-night, Captain Braine,' called Miss Temple in her rich voice; and down we went.

The cabin lamp showed a small light. Miss Temple waited here whilst I went below for one of the two lanterns which the captain

had told me I should find in our berths. I was obliged to kindle a sulphur match, and I remember cursing the tardy operation of obtaining a light whilst I stood hammering away with flint and steel, injuring my knuckles, and wishing the tinder-box at the deuce. I found the lanterns, and left one alight in Miss Temple's cabin, and carried my own, also alight, into the cuddy. Miss Temple's eyes sparkled to the glare as I approached her, and her face might have been a spirit's for its whiteness in that faint illumination vexed with shadows as the lantern swayed to the light rolling of the barque.

'I wish I could sleep here,' said she.

'You will be equally comfortable below,' said I; 'and what is better, quite private.'

'Did you see any rats?'

'None.'

She took my arm with a firm clasp, and hardly seemed willing to release me at the hatch, though the aperture was too narrow to admit of our descending together. When we had gained the lower deck, she again seized my arm and stood staring and hearkening.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' she cried, 'it is very lonely down here!'

'Yes; but you are not alone. You must have courage. I would rather you should be next me than overhead next the captain.'

Yet, as I spoke, my heart was full of pity for her. It was indeed lonely, as she had said, with a sense of imprisonment besides, all that way down, thinking of where we stood, I mean, with reference to the poop. The stowed cases in the forepart seemed to stir as though to some internal throes to the weak light that swung in my hand; the atmosphere was charged with an unpleasant smell of cargo and the mingled fumes of a ship's hold; and there was something of the heat of an oven also in the air that felt to rest with a sort of weight upon the head, due perhaps to the fancy begotten by the nearness of the upper deck or ceiling as you may term it. Small straining noises stole upon the ear from round about in stealthy notes, as though they were giants below moving warily. I say I was full of concern for the poor girl. Somehow the misery of her condition had not before affected me as it now did.

'It will not last long. It will be a thing of the past very shortly: meanwhile, keep up your heart, and trust me as your protector whilst God leaves me a hand to lift,' I exclaimed with a tenderness of which I was insensible until a little later on, when the tones of my voice recurred to me in memory.

She looked at me as though she were about to speak, yet said nothing; and releasing my arm, she stepped to her cabin door and peeped in.

'Is there anything I can do?' said I, keeping at a respectful distance.

She peered awhile, and then answered: 'I think not. But

that candle will not last long, and I shall be in darkness. Or if I should extinguish it, how am I to light it again?'

'If you want a light,' said I, 'knock on the bulkhead. I shall hear you, and will answer by knocking. But it already draws on for twelve o'clock. The dawn will be breaking at five or thereabouts. I trust you will sleep. You greatly need rest.'

I removed my cap to kiss her hand, and met her gaze, that was fixed full of wistfulness upon me. 'Good-night, Miss Temple,' said I. She entered her cabin looking as though her heart was too full for speech, and closed the door.

I was now feeling exceedingly weary, yet, as I feared that she might need me, or, in some nervous fit, knock if it were but to know that I was awake, I filled my pipe, got into Mr. Chicken's bunk, and sat smoking. I cannot express the peculiar character of the stillness down here. It was very extraordinarily accentuated by the sounds which at intervals penetrated it: such as the muffled jar of the rudder working upon its post, the dim wash of water, startlingly close at hand, along with the faint seething noise of the barque's wake hissing within arm's reach, as it seemed, and coming and going upon the hearing fitfully. The suit of oilskins against the bulkhead swayed to the heave of the fabric, and they resembled the body of a man who had hanged himself by the nail from which they dangled. There was a pair of sea-boots up in a corner with a dropsical bulging out about the foot of them in the part where a man's bunions would come, and they showed so very much as if they had just been drawn off the legs of Mr. Chicken, that they grew ghastly presently, and to relieve my imagination, I directed my eyes at other objects.

I sat smoking and full of thought. My eyelids were as of lead, yet my mind continued impertinently active. The horrors we had escaped from lay like the shadow of a thundercloud upon my spirits; the oppression was too violent to suffer the continuance of any emotion of exultation over our deliverance. Dark and dismal fancies possessed me. I thought of Captain Braine as a man whose reason was unsound, and who was capable of playing me some devilish trick; I thought of the coarse and surly carpenter, and of the charge of murder hinted against him by the skipper. I thought of the convicts and of the mutineer in the forecastle, and then my raven-like imagination going to Miss Temple, I reflected that I was unarmed, that I had no weapon about me but a knife, that must prove of very little use should it come to my having to make a fight of it for hers and my own life. Surely, I mused, old Chicken will not have come to sea without some instrument of self-defence, be it blunderbuss, pistol, or cutlass.

I took an earnest view of the interior. There was a locker against the bulkhead that divided Miss Temple's cabin from mine; I had incuriously opened and looked into it when searching for something to divert ourselves with, being by the time I had come to that locker too tired to continue overhauling the dead man's

effects. Besides this receptacle there were two chests of clothes and other matters along with a bagful of things, and a shelf over the bunk filled with odds and ends. There was still about an hour of candle-light in the lantern. I raised the lid of the locker, and found within a truly miscellaneous 'raffle' of objects, as a sailor would term it: charts, slippers, sextant in case, a number of tobacco pipes, bundles of papers, and I know not what besides. At the bottom, in the left-hand corner, was a small canvas bag very weighty for its size. I drew it out, and found about forty pounds in gold inside it, with three Australian one-pound notes, dark with thumbing and pocketing, and a five-pound note scarcely distinguishable for dirt and creases. I replaced the bag; and coming to the other end of the locker, working my way to it through a very rag-and-bottle shop of queer gatherings, I met with the object that I was longing for; to wit, a heavy, long, double-barrelled pistol, with a couple of nipples and a ramrod, and a butt massive enough to bring an ox to earth with. There were a parcel of bullets, and a small brown powder-flask full in the piece of canvas in which the pistol was wrapped; but for some time I could not find any caps. Without them the pistol would not be of the least use, and my satisfaction yielded to mortification as I continued to probe into the locker without result. I was about to abandon the quest in despair, when my fingers touched a circular metal box like to those which used to contain paste for the polishing of boots; I fished it up, and was mighty glad to find it filled with caps. Come, thought I, if difficulties are to happen, I am better off now than I was half an hour ago, anyhow.

All this time there had been no noise next door, and I could but hope that Miss Temple was sleeping. I carefully put the pistol and its little furniture into the foot of my bunk, and pulling off my coat and waistcoat, and removing my shoes, I vaulted on to Mr. Chicken's mattress, blew out the candle in the lantern and stretched my length. It was hard upon two o'clock, however, before I fell asleep. The scuttle or porthole was abreast of the bunk, and the black disc of it framed the low-lying stars of the horizon as they slided up and down to the lift and fall of the hull. My thoughts went out to the great dark ocean, and shivers chased me, hot as the cabin was, as I lay reflecting upon the fire and explosion of the wreck, and upon how it would have been with us if Captain Braine, having taken a view of the hull, had proceeded and left us to our fate. The noises which violated the singular stillness down in that part of the ship where we lay, and which had rendered me somewhat uneasy at first, now proved lulling as I lay hearkening to them, growing drowsier and drowsier. There was a slumberous monotony in the creaking and jarring of the rudder, something soothing in the dim hissing of the wake dying out, and then seething afresh like the noise of champagne in a glass held to the ear, as the frame of the barque slightly soared and sank in delicate floating movements upon the under-run of the dark swell.

Perhaps by this time to-morrow we may be aboard a ship homeward-bound, I remember thinking: and that was the last of my thoughts that night, for I immediately afterwards sank into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BRIG'S LONGBOAT

I WAS awakened by a knocking at the door. The little cabin was bright with sunshine, that was flashing off sea and sky upon the thick glass of the scuttle. 'Hallo!' I cried, 'who is that?' The voice of the young fellow Wilkins responded:

'Capt'n Braine's compliments, sir, and he'd be glad to know if there's anything you or the lady wants which it's in his power to supply ye with?'

I got out of the bunk and opened the door.

'Captain Braine is very kind,' said I to the veal-faced youth, who stood staring at me with faint eyes under his white lashes and brows. 'What time is it, Wilkins?'

'Half-past eight, sir,' he answered.

I knocked upon the bulkhead. 'Are you awake, Miss Temple?'

'Oh yes,' she answered, her voice sounding weak through the partition.

'Captain Braine wishes to know if you are in want of anything it is in his power to let you have?'

'There are many things I want,' she exclaimed; 'but they are not to be had, I fear. I am afraid I shall have to use that comb. I can do nothing with my hair, Mr. Dugdale.'

'All right, Wilkins,' said I; 'we shall be on deck in a few minutes.' He went away.

I found the comb that had belonged to Mr. Chicken on a shelf, and knocked on Miss Temple's door. She opened it, and an arm of snow, of faultless shape, was projected to receive the comb. 'Thank you,' said she, whipping the door to, and I entered my cabin, calling out that I would wait for her there till she was ready.

Happily, in respect of toilet conveniences we were not wholly destitute. The water in my can was indeed salt, but I contrived to get some show of lather out of the fragment of marine soap which I found inside of the tin dish that served me as a wash-basin. I was without Miss Temple's scrupulosity, and found old Chicken's hairbrush good enough to flourish. There was a little parcel of razors, too, on the shelf where the comb had been, and with one of them I made shift to scrape my cheeks into some sort of smoothness, wholly by dint of feeling, for Miss Temple had Chicken's glass, and there was nothing in my cabin to reflect my countenance. By the time this little business was ended, and I had carefully concealed the pistol and powder-flask, Miss Temple was ready. She knocked on my door, and I stepped out.

I could see her but very imperfectly in the dim light of that steerage, yet it seemed to me that there was more vivacity in her eyes, more life in her carriage and air, than I had witnessed in her on the yesterday. She told me that she had slept soundly, and that her mattress was as comfortable as her bed aboard the *Countess Ida*.

'I am heartily glad to hear that,' said I. 'You found the marine soap tough, I fear?'

'It cannot be good for the complexion, I should think,' said she with a slight smile.

'How shocking,' I exclaimed, as we moved to the hatch, 'would such a situation as yours be to a young lady who is dependent for her beauty on cosmetics and powder! How would Miss Hudson manage if she were here, I wonder?'

'Is there anything in sight, do you know, Mr. Dugdale? That is a more important subject to me than complexions.'

'I did not ask; but we will find out.'

It was a brilliant morning, a wide blue, blinding flash of day, as it seemed to my eyes after the gloom below. The sea was all on fire under the sun, and the wind held it trembling gloriously. A hot and sparkling breeze in the same old quarter gushed freshly into the wide expanded wings of the *Lady Blanche*, whose swift pace over the smooth plain of ocean seemed a sort of miracle of sailing to me when I contrasted it with the rate of going of the *Countess Ida*. The flying-fish in scores sparkled out from the barque's white sides. The foam came along her sheathing like a roll of cotton-wool to her wake. The ocean line ran round in a firm edge with an opalescent clarification of the extreme rim that gave the far-off confines a look of crystal.

But I had not stood longer than a minute gazing around me when I spied a gleam of canvas about a point on our weather-bow. I saw it under the curve of the forecourse that lay plain in sight under the lifted clew of the mainsail.

'A sail, Miss Temple!'

'Where?' she cried, with her manner full of fever on the instant. I pointed. 'Oh,' she exclaimed, bringing her hands together, 'if it should be the Indiaman!'

But the captain was walking aft, and it was time to salute him.

'Good morning, sir,' I said as I approached him with Miss Temple at my side. 'We have paused a moment to admire this very beautiful morning. I perceive a sail right ahead, captain.'

It was a part of his destiny, I suppose, that he should stare hard at those who accosted him before answering. He carried his unwinking dead black eye from my companion to me, and then stepped out of the shell of his mood of meditation as a bird might be hatched.

'Hope you slept pretty comfortably?'

'Yes; I passed a good night; and I am happy to know that Miss Temple rested well.'

'Which way is that ship going?' cried the girl, whose cheeks were flushed with impatience.

'She is not a ship, mem,' he answered; 'she is seemingly a big boat that's blowing along the same road as ourselves under a lug.'

The telescope lay on the skylight, and I pointed it. Sure enough the sail was no ship, as I had first imagined, though the white square hovering upon the horizon exactly resembled the canvas of a large craft slowly climbing up the sea. I could readily distinguish a boat, apparently a ship's longboat, running before the wind under a lugsail; but she was as yet too distant to enable me to make out the figures of people aboard, considerable as were the magnifying powers of the glass I levelled at her.

'Only a boat?' cried Miss Temple, in accents of keen disappointment.

'What will a craft of that sort be doing in the middle of this wide sea?' said I.

'She may have gone adrift, as you did,' answered Captain Braine.

'Is it imaginable that she should be the corvette's cutter?' cried Miss Temple, straining her fine eyes, impassioned with conflicting emotion, at the object ahead.

'Oh, no,' said I. 'First of all, the cutter had no sail; next, yonder boat is three or four times bigger than she was; and then, even if she had a sail, I question if she could have run all this distance in the time from the spot she started from.'

I noticed whilst I spoke that Captain Braine watched me with a singular expression, and that his face slightly changed as to an emotion of relief when I had concluded my answer.

'The lady,' said he, 'is speaking of the man-of-war cutter that rowed ye aboard the wreck, and lost ye there?'

'Yes,' said I.

'How many of a crew?' he asked.

'Six men and a lieutenant; but the officer was drowned.'

He took the telescope from me, and brought it to bear upon the little sail over the bow, and kept it levelled for some moments. He then put the glass down and said, 'Have you had any breakfast?'

'Not yet,' I answered.

He called through the skylight to Wilkins, and told him to put some biscuit and tea and cold meat upon the table. 'I have made my meal,' said he, contriving one of his extraordinary bows as he addressed Miss Temple; 'and so, I hope, mem, you'll excuse my presence below. Eat hearty, both of ye, I beg. There's no call to stint yourselves, and I'm sorry I can't put anything more tempting afore ye, as Jack says.'

We at once descended, both of us being anxious to get the meal, such as it might be, over.

'Why is he repeatedly saying, "as Jack says"?' asked Miss Temple.

'Ah!' I exclaimed, 'and why does he stare so? Yet, on my word, he seems an exceedingly good-natured fellow. I assure you we might have fallen into worse hands. No man could make a homeward-bound ship to rise up out of the sea or signal our whereabouts to the *Countess Ida* when she is leagues and leagues out of sight; but another captain might not have shown half the friendly concern this poor eccentric creature exhibits in our comfort.'

She agreed with me, but quickly dropped the subject as something distasteful, and spoke of her disappointment, and of the strangeness of meeting a small boat in the middle of such an ocean as we were sailing through. By some trick above my comprehension, she had contrived to smooth out her dress, insomuch that a deal of its castaway aspect had left it. She had also manœuvred in some fashion with the feather in her hat; and I told her, as she sat opposite me, that she looked as fresh as though she had just left her cabin in the Indiaman.

'Youth must always triumph,' I said, 'if it be but fairly treated. Sleep has made your former self dominant again; but I will reserve all my compliments until I am able to pull my hat off to you ashore and say good-bye.'

She shot a glance at me under her long fringes, but held her peace.

The tea was so vile that I called to Wilkins, who stood on the quarter-deck, to procure us some coffee if there were any aboard; and in a few minutes he returned with a sailor's hook-pot full of it from the galley. This Miss Temple seemed able to sip without a face of aversion. It vexed me to see her imperilling her delicate white teeth with the hard fare that was sheer forecastle stuff, and bad at that; but it was not for me to give orders, nor was I willing to protract our sitting by inquiring if there was other food aboard. Besides, every hour in such weather as this might provide us with the opportunity we hungered for to escape into some homeward-bound ship with a cabin capable of affording endurable entertainment.

We rose from the table, and regained the deck. The moment my head showed above the companion-way, the captain called to me hastily. There was a look of disorder in his countenance that immediately excited my wonder; there was the alacrity of fear in his manner; he could address me now without a prolonged stare and his usual tardy emergence of mind.

'Please, take this glass,' said he, thrusting the telescope into my hand; 'and look at that there boat, and tell me what you think.'

The smooth, swift sliding of the *Lady Blanche* over the level surface of the sea that was running in fire and foam lines to the brushing of the merry breeze and the sparkling of the soaring sun, had closed us rapidly with the boat ahead since Miss Temple and I left the deck. The little fabric was now scarcely more than a mile on the bow, and the captain's glass, when I put it to my eye, brought her as close to me as if she were no further off than our

forecastle. She was a large, carvel-built longboat; one of those round-bowed, broad-beamed structures which in the olden days used to stand in chocks betwixt a ship's foremast and galley, with often another boat stored inside of her, unless she was used to keep sheep or other live stock in. She was deep in the water, and as much of her hull as was visible was of a dingy sallow white. She showed a broad square of dark old lug, before which she was running with some show of nimbleness. She seemed to be crowded with men, and even whilst I stood looking at her through the glass, I counted no less than twenty-seven persons. They were all looking our way, and though it was scarcely possible to define individual faces amid such a yellow huddle of countenances, I could yet manage to determine a prevailing piratic expression of the true sort, suggested not so much by the vagueness of swarthy cheek and shaggy brow as by the singularity of the fellows' apparel—the flapping sombrero, the red sash, the blue shirt, with other details—which but very faintly corresponded indeed with one's notion of the coarse homely attire of the merchant sailor.

Captain Braine's eyes were fixed upon me as I turned to him. 'What do you think of her, sir?' said he.

'I don't like the look of those fellows at all,' I answered. 'I would not mind making a bet that they are a portion of the crew of the privateering brig from whose hull you rescued us yesterday morning.'

'Just the idea that occurred to me,' he cried. He levelled the glass again. 'A boatful of rascals, sir! Armed to the teeth, I daresay, and on the lookout for some such a vessel as mine to seize and get away back to their own waters in. And yet, it is awful, too, to think that the creatures may be in want of water. What's to be done? I can't allow them to board: and I'm not going to heave to, to give 'em a chance of doing so.'

'We're overhauling them fast,' said I. 'Best plan perhaps, captain, will be to hail them as we slide past and ascertain their wants, if we can understand their lingo; and if they need water, there's nothing to be done but to send some adrift for them to pick up. But for God's sake, sir, don't let them come aboard. They look as devilish a lot of cut-throats as ever I saw; and besides the safety of our lives and of the ship, we have this lady to consider.'

Captain Braine listened to me with his eyes fixed upon the boat.

'She can't hook on at this,' said he, as if thinking aloud; 'we should tow her under water at such a pace. By heavens,' he shouted with a wild look coming into his face, 'if she attempts to sheer alongside, I'll give her the stem!' and springing with the agility of a monkey upon the rail, he grasped a backstay, and stood in a posture for hailing the boat as we swept past.

Forward, the seamen had quitted the jobs they were upon, and were staring open-mouthed from the forecastle rail. I picked up the glass again to look at the crowd, and every face in the lens was

now as distinct as Miss Temple's who stood beside me. An uglier, more ferocious-looking set of men never stepped the deck of a picaroon. I had not the least doubt whatever that they were a portion of the crew of the brig. Indeed, I seemed to have some recollection of the boat, for I remembered, whilst examining the brig from the poop of the Indiaman, that I had been struck by the unusual size of her longboat, and that the colour of her was the sallow pea-soup tint of the fabric yonder. There were several chocolate-coloured faces amongst the little crowd; here and there, a coal-black countenance with a frequent glitter of earrings and gleam of greasy ringlets. Many of them eyed us over the low gunwale under the sharp of their hands; one stood erect on the thwart through which the mast was stepped, clasping the spar with his arm, and apparently waiting to hail us. The steersman watched us continuously, and now and again the boat's head would slightly fall off to a sneaking movement of the helm, as though to some notion of edging down upon us without attracting our observation. But the barque's keen stem was ripping through the water as the jaws of a pair of shears drive through a length of sailcloth. I had no fear of the boat hooking on; she would have to manœuvre under our bows to do that, and it needed but a little twirl of the spokes of our wheel to drive her into staves and to send her people bobbing and drowning into our wake.

'Boat ahoy!' shouted the captain with such delivery of voice as I should have thought impossible in so narrow shouldered a man.

'Yash! yash!' vociferated the fellow who clasped the mast, frantically brandishing his arms. 'Ve are shipwreck—you veel take us—ve starve!'

The captain looked and hardly seemed to know what to say.

'How long have you been adrift?' he bawled.

The fellow, who wore a red nightcap, shook it till the tassel danced to the violent gestures of his head. He evidently did not understand the question. 'Take us!' he shrieked—'ve starve!'

The boat was now on the bow, within pistol-shot from the forecastle rail.

'Mind your helm, Captain Braine,' I suddenly shouted, 'or she'll be aboard you!' for my young and, in those days, keen eyes had marked the action of the fellow who steered the boat, and even as I bawled out the head of the little fabric swept round with a fellow in the bows flourishing a boathook to which was attached a length of line, and others standing by ready to help him when he should have hooked on.

'Steady as she goes!' cried Captain Braine.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' shrieked Miss Temple, 'they will get on board of us!'

The boat's head drove sheering alongside into our bow just forward of the fore-chain plates. I saw the fellow erect in her head fork out his boathook to catch hold.

'Let go!' roared a voice forward. The figure of Joe Wetherly

overhung the rail, poising either an iron marline-spike or a belaying-pin, or some short bar of metal; this I saw. Then he hurled it at the moment that the boathook had caught a plate. The missile struck the man full on the head; he fell like a statue in the bottom of the boat, and the boat herself ground past us as the barque, to the impulse of her great overhanging squares of studdingsail, swept onwards at some seven or eight knots in the hour.

They were so crowded as to be in one another's road. I saw a dozen grimy paws extended to catch hold of the main-chain plates as the boat came bruising and groaning and washing past; but the iron bars were swept like smoke out of the wretches' frantic grip. Never shall I forget the picture the little fabric offered in the swift glimpse I caught of her as she glided past. The crowd in their desperate efforts to catch hold of the sweeping projections in the barque's side, squirmed and surged and rose and fell like rags of meat stirred up in a boiling stewpot. Their cries, their yells, their Spanish oaths, the brandishings of their arms, the fury expressed in their malignant faces, the sudden uprootal and crash of their one mast and sail by the fouling of it with our mainbrace, all combine into a memory which is not to be expressed in words. I caught sight of a number of breakers in the bottom of the boat along with some bags, and was instinctively assured that they were lacking in neither food nor water. As the boat sped under the rail on which Captain Braine was standing, the fellow who had been at her helm, a brawny mulatto in a wide straw-hat, loose red shirt, and naked feet, suddenly whipped a pistol out of his breast, took aim at the skipper, and fired; and, then, in a breath or two, the craft was astern, tumbling in the seething white of our wake, lessening into a toy even as you looked, with half of her people getting the wreck of mast and rail inboard, and the rest of them furiously gesticulating at us.

Captain Braine stood on the rail watching them with an air of musing that was incredibly odd in the face of the wild excitement of the moment.

'Are you hurt?' I cried.

He turned slowly to survey me, then very leisurely dismounted from his perch, meanwhile continuing to gaze at me.

'No,' said he, after an interval during which I ran my eyes over him with anxiety, thinking to see blood or to behold him suddenly fall; 'it's all right. This is the fourth time I've been shot at in my life; and be my end what it will, it is certain I am not to perish by another man's bullet. Rogues all, ha!' he continued, directing his dead black vision at the boat astern; 'they would have carried the little *Blanche*, and slit our throats. Just the sort of ship, sir, for the likes of their trade: the heels of a racehorse and the sober look of the honest marchantman. Slit our throats; all saving *yours*, mem, I expect; but only to reserve ye for something worse than death to you, if your noble looks don't belie your taste.'

'They never could have held on with that boathook,' said I,

struck more by the man's manner than his speech, strange as *it* was. 'I suppose they hoped to cling long enough to chuck a few of their beauties aboard us. Well, Miss Temple, let us trust that we have now seen the very last of that confounded privateer brig and the gallant, good-looking chaps who stocked her.'

'When is all this going to end?' said she.

'Every man of them,' exclaimed the captain, 'will have had a firearm in his breast.'

'No doubt,' I answered; 'the vessel must have been handsomely furnished in that way to judge by what we found remaining in the cabin of the wreck.'

'Were they starving, d'ye think?' he exclaimed with a sudden troubled manner, as he looked at the speck in our wake.

'I should say not,' said I; 'there were breakers in the bottom of the boat, and parcels resembling bread bags aft.'

'Thirst is a fearful thing at sea, sir,' said he, slowly: 'it's worse than hunger. Hunger, whilst it remains appetite, is agreeable; but the first sensation of thirst is a torture. I have known 'em both—I have known 'em both,' he added, with a melancholy shake of his head and a profound sigh; then bringing his unwinking stare to bear upon me, he exclaimed: 'Supposing that shot had taken effect, the *Lady Blanche* would now be without a master; and if you wasn't on board, she'd be without a navigator. Less than two sea-going heads to every ship *won't* do. I felt that truth when Chicken went, and I'm feeling of it every time I catch sight of that there man Lush.' Miss Temple and I exchanged glances. 'Well,' said he, with one of his mirthless grins, 'I don't expect those privateersmen 'll trouble us any more;' and in his abrupt way he walked to the compass, and stood there looking alternately from it to the canvas.

CHAPTER XXVIII

I QUESTION WETHERLY

It had now become so much one thing on top of another with us, and everything happening in a moment, so to speak, too: first our being left on the wreck all in a breath, as it were: then our being picked up by this barque without the dimmest prospect, as my instincts advised me, of our falling in with the *Countess Ida* this side of Bombay: then our destitute condition aboard a craft whose skipper's sanity I was now honestly beginning to distrust, and whose people, if he did not lie, were for the most part a gang of scoundrels: then this sudden narrow shave of being boarded by above a score of miscreants whose undoubted hope was to seize the *Lady Blanche* and to use her in the room of their own extinguished brig; I say it was so much one thing on top of another—a catalogue of adventures scarcely conceivable in these safe-going days of the ocean mailboat, though real enough and in one way or another

frequent enough in my time, I mean in the time of this narrative—that I protest something of the dismay which possessed Miss Temple visited me, though I struggled hard in the direction of a composed face, as we talked over the incident of the morning, and took a view of the singular staring figure who had charge of the barque, and directed our eyes at the crew, all hands of whom hung about forward, briskly yarning, as I might suppose, about the Spanish long-boat's attempt (and with God knows what sympathy, I would think, as I peered at the groups), or as we sent our eager gaze into the blue and brilliant ocean distance in search of any little leaning flake of white that might flatter us with promise of escape from our disagreeable situation.

'I have fully and immovably formed my opinion on two points,' said Miss Temple to me as we continued to pace the deck together for some half hour after the boat had disappeared astern: 'one is, that Captain Braine is mad; and the other that he is firmly bent on making you serve him as his mate.'

'I own that I now believe he is madder than I first suspected,' I answered. 'His manner and language to you just now were extraordinary. But as to his employing me as mate—I think this: if the man is crazy, he may easily go wrong in his navigation; if we sight nothing that will carry us home, we must obviously stick to the barque, and her safety, therefore, is ours; consequently, it is desirable I think that I should know what her skipper is doing with her from day to day; and this I can contrive by consenting to oblige him with taking sights.'

'I see what you mean,' she exclaimed thoughtfully. 'I had not taken that view; but it is a cruel one to entertain; it implies our remaining on board until—until——Oh, Mr. Dugdale! this sort of imprisonment for the next two or three months is not to be borne.'

'Anyway,' said I, 'you now understand that our very safety demands we should know where that fellow is carrying his ship. If, then, he should request me to shoot the sun, as we call it, you will not be vexed by my compliance?'

'Who am I, Mr. Dugdale, that you should trouble yourself about my opinion?'

'You can make yourself felt,' said I, smiling; 'I should consider your eyes matchless in their power to subdue. There is a little passage in Shakespeare that very exquisitely fits my theory of you.'

'I would rather not hear it,' she answered, with a slight curl of her lip and a faint tinge of rose in her cheeks. 'You once applied to me a sentence from Shakespeare that was very unflattering.'

'What was it?'

'You compared my complexion to the white death that one of Shakespeare's girls talks about.'

'I remember. I am astonished that your aunt should have repeated to you what she overheard by stealth.'

'I do not understand,' she exclaimed, firing up.

'She was behind me when I made that quotation, and I was unconscious of her presence. She should have respected my ignorance. I meant no wrong,' I went on, pretending to get into a passion. 'Your complexion is pale, and I sought to illustrate it to my little friend Saunders by an expression of striking nobility and beautiful dignity. If ever I have the fortune to find myself in your aunt's company, I shall give her my mind on this business. How am I to know but that her repeating what she had heard me let fall excited in you the disgust I found in your treatment of me?'

She cooled down as I grew hot.

'The extravagance of your language shocks me,' she exclaimed, but with very little temper in her voice. 'Disgust? You have no right to use that word. You were always very courteous to me on board the *Countess Ida*.'

'Am I less so here?' said I, still preserving an air of indignation.

'Do not let us quarrel,' she said gently, with such a look of sweetness in her eyes as I should have thought their dark and glowing depths incapable of.

'If we quarrel, it will not be my fault,' said I, disguising myself with my voice, whilst I looked seawards that my face might not betray me.

At that moment the captain called out my name: 'Can I have a word with you, sir?' he cried along the short length of poop, standing as he was at the wheel, whilst we were conversing at the fore-end of the raised deck.

'With pleasure,' I answered.

'I shall go into the cabin,' said Miss Temple; 'it is too hot here. You will come and tell me what he wants.'

I waited until she had descended the ladder, and then strolled over to the captain, determined to let him know by my careless air that whatever I did for him he must regard as an obligation, or as an expression of my gratitude; but that I was not to be commanded. I believed I could witness an expression of embarrassment in his fixed regard that I had not before noticed in him. He eyed me as though lost in thought, and I waited.

'Would you object,' said he, 'to ascertain our latitude at noon to-day?'

'Not in the least.'

He seemed to grow a little brighter. 'And I should feel obliged,' he continued, 'if you'd work out the longitude.'

'With pleasure,' I said. I looked at my watch. 'But I have no sextant.'

'I have a couple,' he exclaimed; 'I will lend you one;' and down he went for it with a fluttered demeanour of eagerness.

I lingered till I supposed he had entered his cabin, then put my head into the skylight and called softly to Miss Temple, who was seated almost directly beneath for the air there: 'He wishes me to take an observation with him.'

'What is that?' she answered, also speaking softly and turning up her face.

'I am to shoot the sun—you know, Miss Temple.'

'Oh, pray contrive to make some error—commit some blunder to make him suppose——' She checked herself, and I heard the captain say that it was very hot as he came to the companion steps.

In a few moments he arrived on deck, hugging a brace of sextant cases to his heart. He told me to choose; I took the one nearest to me, perceived that the instrument was almost new, and as it was now hard upon the hour of noon, applied it to my eye, the captain standing alongside of me ogling the sun likewise. I could see the men forward, waiting for the skipper to make eight bells, staring their hardest at the now unusual spectacle to them of two sextants at work. For my part, I should have been shocked by the weakness of my memory if I had not known what to do. During the two years I had spent at sea I was thoroughly grounded in navigation—such as it was in those days; and as I stood screwing the sun down to the horizon, the whole practice of the art, so far as my education in it went, came back to me as freshly as though I had been taking sights ever since.

We made eight bells. Mr. Lush came aft to relieve the deck, and I went below with Captain Braine to work out the barque's position.

I smiled at Miss Temple as I entered the cuddy; she watched me eagerly, and the movement of her lips seemed to say, 'Don't be long.' In fact, her face had that meaning; and I gave her a reassuring nod ere turning to follow the captain into his berth. The apartment was small and cheerful, plainly stocked with the customary details of a humble skipper's sea bedroom; a cot, a small table, a cushioned locker, a few mathematical instruments, a little hanging shelf of strictly nautical books, and so on. His chronometer was a good one, handsome for those days, of a quality one would hardly expect to find in a little trading-barque of the pattern of this *Lady Blanche*. There was a bag of charts in a corner, and a small chart of the world lay half-unrolled upon the table, with a bit of the Atlantic Ocean visible exhibiting the skipper's 'pricking' or tracing of his course down to the preceding day.

'Here's ink and paper, sir,' said he; 'sit ye down, and let's see if we can tally.'

I was always a tolerably quick hand at figures, and had soon completed my calculations, feeling as though I was at sea again in sober professional earnest. The captain worked with extraordinary gravity; his singular eyes overhung the paper without a wink, and his yellow countenance, with his blue chops and chin, wore the melancholy of a mute's face, mixed with an indefinable quality of distress, as though his mental efforts were putting him to physical pain. We agreed to a second in our latitude, but differed in our longitude by something over seven miles.

'You'll be in the right, sir—you'll be in the right!' he cried, smiting the table with his fist. 'It is clear you know the ropes, Mr. Dugdale. I'll abide by your reckonings. And now I want ye to do me a further sarvice.'

'What is that, captain?' said I.

'Well, ye may reckon, of course, that I can write,' he answered; 'but I never was topweight with my pen, as Jack says, nor, for the matter of that, was Chicken much of a hand. There was some words which he was always making a foul hawse of. Now, what I want ye to do, Mr. Dugdale, is to keep my log for me.'

'All this,' said I carelessly, yet watching him with attention, 'is practically making a chief officer of me.' He did not answer. 'Of course, I don't object,' I continued, stimulated more perhaps by Miss Temple's than by my own views, 'to oblige in any possible manner a gentleman ——'

'I am no gentleman,' said he, with a wave of the hand.

'—— to whom Miss Temple and myself owe our lives. But I may take it that it is thoroughly understood the young lady and myself are to quit your hospitable little ship at the first opportunity that may offer.'

He regarded me in silence for I should say at least a minute; I was positively beginning to believe that he had fallen dumb. At last he seemed to come to life. He nodded slowly three times and said very deliberately: 'Mr. Dugdale, you and me will be having a talk later on.'

'But good God, captain,' cried I, startled out of my assumed manner of indifference or ease, 'you will at least assure me that you'll make no difficulty of transhipping us when the chance to do so occurs?'

He was again silent, all the while staring at me; and presently, in a deep voice, said, 'Later on, sir;' and with that stood up.

'How much later on?' I inquired.

He tapped his brow with his forefinger and answered: 'It needs reflection, and I must see my way clearly. So far it's all right. I'm much obliged to ye, I'm sure;' and he went to the door and held it open, closing it upon himself after I had stepped out.

At the instant I resolved to tell Miss Temple of what had passed; then swiftly thought no! it will only frighten the poor girl, and she cannot advise me; I must wait a little; and with a smiling face I seated myself by her side. But secretly, I was a good deal worried. I chatted lightly, told her that there was nothing whatever significant in the captain's request that I should check his calculations by independent observations, and did my utmost, by a variety of cheerful small talk referring wholly to our situation, to keep her heart up. Nevertheless, secretly I was much bothered. The man had something on his mind of a dark mysterious nature, it seemed to me; and I could not question that it formed the motive of his interrogatories as to my seamanship, and of his testing my qualities as a navigator by putting a sextant

into my hand. Whatever his secret might prove, was it likely to stand between us and our quitting this barque for something homeward bound? It was most intolerably certain that if Captain Braine chose to keep me aboard, I must remain with him. For how should I be able to get away? Suppose I took it upon myself to signal a vessel when he was below: the hailing, the noise of backing the yards, the clamour of the necessary manœuvring, would hardly fail to bring him on deck; and if he chose to order the men to keep all fast with the boat, there could be no help for it; he was captain, and the seamen would obey him.

These thoughts, however, I kept to myself. The day passed quietly. Again and again Miss Temple and I would search the waters for any sign of a ship; but I took notice that the barrenness of the ocean did not produce the same air of profound misery and dejection which I had witnessed in her yesterday. In fact, she had grown weary of complaining; she was beginning to understand the idleness of it. From time to time, though at long intervals, something fretful would escape her, some reference to the wretched discomfort of being without change of apparel; to the misfortune of having fallen in with a ship, whose forecastle people, if her captain was to be believed, were for the most part no better than the company of brigands whom we had scraped clear of that morning. But it seemed to me that she was slowly schooling herself to resignation, that she had formed a resolution to look with some spirit into the face of our difficulties, a posture of mind I was not a little thankful to behold in her, for, God knows, my own anxiety was heavy enough, and I did not want to add to it the sympathetic trouble her grief and despair caused me.

All day long the weather continued very glorious. The captain ordered a short awning to be spread over the poop, and Miss Temple and I sat in the shadow of it during the greater part of the afternoon. There was nothing to read: there was no sort of amusement to enable us to kill the time. Nevertheless, the hours drifted fleetly past in talk. Miss Temple was more communicative than she had ever before been; talked freely of her family, of her friends and acquaintances, of her visits abroad, and the like. She told me that she was never weary of riding, that her chief delight in life was to follow the hounds; and indeed she chatted so fluently on one thing and another that she appeared to forget our situation: a note almost of gaiety entered her voice; her dark eyes sparkled, and the cold, marble-like beauty of her face warmed to the memories which rose in her. I gathered from her conversation that she was the only living child of her mother, and that there was nothing between her and a very tolerable little fortune, as I might infer from her description of the home Lady Temple had kept up in her husband's life, and that she still, though in a diminished degree, supported for the sake of her daughter, though she herself lay paralysed and helpless, looked after in Miss Temple's absence by a maiden sister.

I recollect wondering whilst I listened to her that so fine a woman as she, and a fortune to boot, had not long ago married. Was she waiting for some man with whom she could fall in love? or was it some large dream of title and estate that hindered her? or was it that she was without a heart? No, thought I; her heart will have had nothing to do with it. Your heartless girls get married as fast as the rest of them. And was she heartless? It was not easy to let one's gaze plumb the glowing liquid depths of her eyes, which seemed to my fancy to be charged with the fires of sensibility and passion, and believe her heartless.

There was something wild in the contrast betwixt the imaginations she raised in me by her talk of her home and her pleasures with her own beauty at hand to richly colour every fancy she inspired—betwixt my imagination, I say, and the realities about us, as I would most poignantly feel whenever I sent a glance at old Lush. He was a mule of a man, and stood doggedly at a distance, never addressed, nor offered indeed, to approach us, though sometimes I would catch him taking me in from head to toe out of the corner of his surly eyes. Possibly, my showing that I had a trick of navigation above his knowledge excited his spleen; or maybe his hatred of the captain led him to dislike me because of the apparent intimacy between the skipper and me. Anyway, I would catch myself looking at him now with a feeling of misgiving for which I could find no reason outside of the mere movement of my instincts.

It was in the second dog watch that evening; Miss Temple was resting in the little cuddy, and I stepped on to the main-deck to smoke a pipe. The topmast canvas of the barque delicately swayed under a cloudless heaven that was darkly, deeply, beautifully blue with the shadow of the coming night. A large star trembled above the ocean verge in the east; but the glow of the sunset still lingered in the west over a sea of wonderful smoothness rippling in frosty lines to the breeze that gushed from between the sunset and the north.

The carpenter had charge of the deck; the captain was in his cabin. Whilst I lighted my pipe, I caught sight of the man Joe Wetherly seated on the coaming of the forehatch past the little galley. He was puffing at an inch of dusky clay with his arms folded upon his breast, and his countenance composed into an air of sailorly meditation. This seemed an opportunity for me to learn what he had to tell or might be willing to impart about the inner life of the *Lady Blanche*, and I went along the deck in an easy saunter, as though it was my notion to measure the planks for an evening stroll. I started when abreast of him with a manner of pleased surprise.

'Oh! it is you, Wetherly? My old acquaintance Smallridge's friend! No sign of the Indiaman, though. I fear we have outrun her by leagues. And always when you are on the lookout for a sail at sea nothing heaves into sight.'

He rose to my accost, and saluted me with a respectful sea-bow,

that is, by scraping his forehead with his knuckle with a little kick back of his left leg.

'That's right enough, sir,' he answered. 'I've been sailing myself in a ship for six weeks in middling busy waters, too, with ne'er a sight of anything—not so much as the tail of a gull.'

'Pray sit,' said I; 'I'll keep you company. This is the right spot for a smoke and a yarn; quiet and cool and out of the road of the poop.'

He grinned, and we seated ourselves side by side. I talked to him first about the *Countess Ida*, explained the circumstance of my being in company with Miss Temple, told him who she was, and spoke of her shipwrecked condition so far as her wardrobe went, and how eager she was to return to England; but the old sailor made very little of her being in want of a change of dress.

'There is no need, sir,' said he, 'for the lady to distress her mind with considerations of a shift o' vestments. I allow she can use a needle for herself; there's needles and thread at her sarvice forrads; and how much linnen do she want? Why one of the skipper's table-cloths 'ud fit her out, I should say.' He turned his figure-head of a face upon me as he added: ''Tain't the loss of clothes, sir, as should occupy her thoughts, but the feeling that she's been took off that there wreck and is safe.'

I fully agreed with him, with some inward laughter, wondering what Miss Temple would think if she had overheard his speech. One thing led to another; at last I said:

'Wetherly, I am going to ask you a plain question; it is one sailor making inquiry of another, and you'll accept me as a shipmate, I know.' He nodded. 'Is not your captain wanting?' and I touched my head.

'Well,' he answered after a pause, '*I* think so, and I've been a-thinking so pretty nigh ever since I've been along with him.'

'What caused his mate's death?'

'He died in a swound,' he answered—'fell dead alongside the wheel as he was looking into the compass.'

'Have the sailors noticed anything queer in their captain?'

'They're such a party of ignorant scow-bankers,' said he, with a slow look round, to make sure that the coast was clear, 'that I don't believe they're capable of noticing anything if it ain't a pannikin of rum shoved under their noses.'

'I don't mind whispering to you,' said I, 'that the captain hinted to me they were not a very reputable body of men—talked vaguely of mutineers and convicts, with one fellow amongst them,' I went on, bating my voice to a mere whisper, 'who had committed a murder.'

He stared at me a moment, and then tilted his cap over his nose to scratch the back of his head.

'He'll know more about 'em, then, than I do,' he responded; 'they're ignorant enough to do wrong without troubling themselves much to think of the job when it was over. Mutineering I don't doubt some of 'em have practised. As to others of 'em being

convicts, why who's to tell? Likely as not, says I. But when it comes to murder—a middling serious charge, ain't it, sir? Of course I dunno—who might the party be, sir?'

'Oh!' I exclaimed, 'it was a vague sort of talk, as I told you. But if Miss Temple and I are to stick to this ship till we get to the Mauritius, it would comfort her, and me, too, for the matter of that, to learn that her crew are not the band of ruffians we have been led to imagine them.'

'Well, sir,' he exclaimed thoughtfully—'I'm sure you'll forgive me, but I don't rightly recollect your name.'

'Dugdale.'

'Well, Mr. Dugdale, as you asks for my opinion, I'll give it ye. Of course, it'll go no furder, as between man and man.'

'Certainly not. I am myself trusting you up to the hilt, as what I have said must assure you. You may speak in perfect confidence.'

He cast a cautious look round: 'There's but one man to be regularly afeerd of, and that's Mr. Lush. I believe he'd knife the capt'n right off if so be as he could be sure we men wouldn't round upon him. I don't mean to say he han't got cause to hate the capt'n. He's a working man without knowledge of perlite customs, and I believe the capt'n's said more to him than he ought to have said; more than any gen'leman would have dreamt of saying, and all because this here carpenter han't got the art o' dining in a way to please the eye. But this here Mr. Lush feels it too much: he's allowed it to eat into his mind; and if so be there should come a difficulty, the capt'n wouldn't find a friend in him, and so I tells ye, sir. I don't want to say more n's necessary and proper to this here occasion of your questions; but though the crew's a desperate ignorant one, ne'er a man among 'em capable of writing or spelling any more'n the carpenter hisself, there's only *him* to be afeerd of, so far as I'm capable of disarning; though, of course, if he should tarn to and try and work up their feelings, there's naturally no telling how the sailors 'ud show.'

'They seem a pretty smart set of fellows,' said I, finding but little comfort to be got out of this long-winded delivery; 'the ship is beautifully clean, and everything looks to be going straight aboard of you.'

'Oh! every man can do his bit,' he answered; 'but if I was you, sir, being in charge, as you are, of a beautiful young lady, for the likes of which this here little barque, with nothen but men aboard and such shabby food as goes aft, is no proper place—if I was you, I says, says I, I'd get away as soon as ever I could.'

I mentally bestowed a few sea-blessings on the head of this marine Job's comforter, but contrived, nevertheless, to look as though I was much obliged to him for his information and advice; and after we had continued discoursing on a variety of nautical topics for some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour longer, I proceeded aft, and spent the rest of the evening in conversing with Miss Temple in the cabin or in walking the deck with her.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CAPTAIN BEGINS A STORY

For a couple of days nothing that need find a place in this narrative happened. On the afternoon of the third day of our being aboard the barque we sighted a sail, hull down, to windward. I climbed into the main-top and examined her through the glass, and found her a brig, very loftily rigged, her canvas soaring into moon-sails, a sight I had never before witnessed at sea, even in those days when ships went more heavily draped than they do in these. She was heading our course, perhaps making a slightly more weatherly navigation, and full blown as she looked to be—a large, soft cloud of canvas in the lenses of the telescope—we passed her at the rate of two feet to her one; and some time before sunset we had sunk her to her royals on the quarter.

Miss Temple wanted me to ask Captain Braine to run the *Lady Blanche* into speaking distance of the brig, that we might ascertain where she was bound to and get on board of her. 'For she may be sailing,' she said, 'to some South American port that will be, comparatively speaking, close at hand, where we shall be easily able to find a ship to convey us home.' But after thinking a little I decided to keep quiet. It would not sound very graciously to request Captain Braine to transhipus into an outward-bound vessel: nor would it be wise to put him to the trouble of deviating from his course merely, perhaps, to ascertain that the brig was bound round the Horn to parts more distant than the Mauritius. Besides, I had no wish to court a blunt refusal from Captain Braine to put his vessel within hailing distance of another until a real opportunity to get to England should present itself by some homeward-bound ship passing close; when, of course, I should take my chance of his assent or refusal. So I suffered the brig to veer away out of sight without speaking to the captain about her, or even appearing to again heed her after I had come down from aloft.

It was a terribly dull, anxious, weary time; I am speaking of those two uneventful days. The hot breeze had drawn abeam, and blew feverishly under a cloudless sky that was a dazzle of brass all about the sun from morn till evening. We showed royals and a fore-topmast-studdingsail to it, and drove along over the smooth plain with half a fathom's height of foam at the cutwater, and a spin and hurry of snow alongside that made the eyes which watched it reel. I entered the day's work and the necessary observations, and so forth, in the log-book in compliance with the captain's request. He was delighted with my handwriting, sat contemplating it with his unwinking gaze for some considerable time, as though it were a picture, and then, drawing a deep breath, exclaimed: 'There's no question but that eddication's a first-class article. Look at your writing alongside of mine, and at mine alongside of

Chicken's. Chicken and me was brought up in the same college—a ship's forecastle, and so far from standing amazed at my own fist and that there spelling, I'm only astonished that I'm able to read or write at all.'

However, though he broke forth thus, he fell silent, and remained so afterwards, became, indeed, extraordinarily meditative, and at meal-times scarcely opened his lips, though his stare grew more deliberate in proportion as his reserve increased, until it came at last to his never taking his eyes off one or the other of us. Again and again Miss Temple would say to me that she was certain he had something on his mind, and she looked frightened as she theorised upon his secret. Sometimes, when on deck, I would observe him standing at the rail, gazing seaward, and talking to himself, frequently snapping his fingers, whipping round, as though suddenly conscious that he had talked aloud, then starting off in a short, restless, unsteady walk, coming to an abrupt halt to again mutter and to snap his fingers with the air of one labouring to form a resolution.

It was on the afternoon of the second day of those two about which I have spoken, and it was drawing on to six o'clock, four bells of the first dog-watch. The captain had been on deck since four, and for the last twenty minutes he had been standing a little to the right of the fellow who was steering, eyeing me with an intentness that had a long time before become embarrassing, and I may say distressing. Whenever I turned my head towards him, I found his gaze fixed upon me. Miss Temple and I were seated too near him to admit of our commenting upon the singular regard that he was bestowing upon me. She contrived to whisper, however, that she was certain his secret, whatever it was, was slowly rising from the depths of his soul to the surface of his mind.

'I seem to find a change in the man's face,' she said under her breath. 'Let us walk, Mr. Dugdale. Such scrutiny as that is unbearable.'

As she spoke, four bells were struck forward. Mr. Lush, who was leaning against his windlass end, knocked the ashes out of his pipe and slowly came aft to relieve the deck. I rose to walk with Miss Temple as she had proposed. Captain Braine called my name. He met me as I approached him, and said: 'I want to have a talk with you in my cabin.'

There was something in his manner that alarmed me. How shall I express it? An air of uneasy exultation, as of a mind proud of the achievement of a resolution at which the secret instincts tremble. For a moment I hung in the wind, strongly reluctant to box myself up alone, unarmed as I was, with a man whose insanity, to call it so, seemed stronger in him at this moment than I had ever before observed it. But the carpenter had now gained the poop; and the captain, on seeing him, instantly walked to the companion, down which he went to midway the ladder, and there stood waiting for me to follow him.

Tut, thought I, surely I am more than his match in strength, and I am on my guard! As I put my foot on the ladder—the captain descending on seeing me coming—I paused to lean over the cover and say to Miss Temple:

'If you will remain on deck, I shall be able to get away from him if he should prove tedious, by telling him that I have you to look after.'

'What do you imagine he wishes to say?' she exclaimed with a face of alarm that came very near to consternation.

I could only answer with a helpless shrug of the shoulders, and the next minute I had entered Captain Braine's cabin.

'Pray sit you down,' said he. He pulled off his straw hat and sent it wheeling through the air into a corner, as though it were a boomerang, and fell to drying his perspiring face upon a large pocket-handkerchief; then folding his arms tightly across his breast, and crooking his right knee whilst he dropped his chin somewhat, he stood gazing at me under the shadow of his very heavy eyebrows with a steadfastness I could only compare to the stare of a cat's eye.

'Well, Captain Braine,' said I in an off-hand way, though I watched him with the narrowness of a man who goes in fear, 'what now is it that I am to hear from you? Do you propose to ask me more questions on navigation and seamanship?'

'Mr. Dugdale,' he exclaimed, speaking very slowly, though the excitement that worked in him rendered his voice deep and unusually clear and loud, 'I have come to the conclusion that you are a gentleman very well able to sarve me, and by sarving me to sarve yourself. I've been a-turning of it over in all hours of the day and a good many hours in the night, too, since the moment when ye first stepped over the side, and I've resolved to take ye into my confidence.'

He nodded, and stood looking at me without speech for a few moments; then seated himself near me and leaned forwards with a forefinger upon his thumb in a posture of computing.

'It was in the year 1831,' he began, 'that I was third-mate aboard of a ship called the *Ocean Monarch*. We sailed from London with a cargo of mixed goods, bound to the port of Callao. Nothing happened till we was well round to the west'ards of Cape Horn, when the ship was set afire by the live cinders of the cabin stove burning through the deck. The cargo was of an inflammable kind. In less than two hours the vessel was in a blaze from stem to starn, by which time we had got the boats over, and lay at a distance waiting for her to disappear. There was two boats, the long-boat and a jolly-boat. The long-boat was a middling big consarn, and most of the men went in her along with the captain, a man named Matthews, and the second mate, a foreign chap named Falck. In our boat was the chief mate, Mr. Ruddiman, myself, two sailors, and a couple of young apprentices. We was badly stocked with water and food; and after the *Ocean Monarch* had

foundered, Captain Matthews sings out to Mr. Ruddiman to keep company. But it wasn't to be done. The long-boat ran away from us, and then she hove-to and took us in tow; but there came on a bit of a sea, and the line parted, and next morning we was alone.'

He paused.

'I am closely following you,' said I, fancying I perceived in his face a suspicion of inattention in me, and wondering what on earth his story was going to lead to. He stood up, and folding his arms in the first attitude he had adopted, proceeded, his voice deep and clear.

'It came on to blow hard from the south'ard and east'ard, and we had to up hellum and run before the seas for our lives. This went on for three or four days, till Mr. Ruddiman reckoned that we was blowed pretty nigh half-way across to the Marquesas. It then fell a stark calm, and we lay roasting under a broiling sun with no fresh water in the boat, and nothing to eat but a handful of mouldy fragments of biscuit in the bottom of a bag that had been soaked with spray o'er and o'er again. One of the apprentices went mad, and jumped overboard, and was drownded. We was too weak to help him; besides, ne'er a one of us but thought him well off in that cool water, leaving thirst and hunger behind him, and sinking into a deep sleep, as it might be. Then the other apprentice was took bad, and died in a fit of retching, and we put him over the side. When daylight broke on the morning following that job, we saw one of the sailors dead in the bottom of the boat. T'other was the sicklier man of the two, yet he hung out, sir, and lived for three days. We kept his body.'

His deep tones ceased, and he stared at me. Just a story of a bad shipwreck, thought I, so far.

'There came a light breeze from the east'ard,' he continued after a little pause; 'but neither Mr. Ruddiman nor me had the strength of a kitten in our arms, and we let the boat drive, waiting for death. I thought it had come that same afternoon, and on top of the sensation followed a fit, I allow, for I recollect no more, till on opening my eyes I found myself in a hammock in the 'tween-decks of a little ship. The craft was a small Spanish vessel, called the *Rosario*. She had floated into sight of our boat, and there was just enough strength left in Mr. Ruddiman to enable him to flourish his handkerchief so as they might see the boat had something alive in her. Ne'er a soul aboard spoke a syllable of English, and neither Mr. Ruddiman nor me understood a word of Spanish. We couldn't even get to larn where the brigantine was bound to, or where she hailed from. We conversed with the crew in signs all the same as though we had been cast away among savages. We was both hearty men in those days, and it wasn't long afore we had picked up what we had let fall during our ramble in the boat. Well, the course the vessel made was something to the south'ard o' west, and I took it we were heading for

an Australian port ; but though I'd make motions, and draw with a piece of chalk on the deck, I'd never get more'n a stare, and a shake of the head and a grin, and a shrug of the shoulders, for an answer. In fact, it was like being sent adrift along with a company of monkeys.'

He dried his face again, took his seat as before, and leaned towards me in his former computing posture with his eyes glued to my face. The singularity of their habitual expression was now greatly heightened by a look of wildness, which I attributed in a measure to the emotions kindled in him by this recital of past and dreadful sufferings. I sat as though engrossed by his story ; but I had an eye for every movement in him as well as for his face.

'It came on to blow a gale of wind one night after we had been aboard the brigantine about a fortnight. They were a poor lot of sailors in the vessel, and so many as to be in one another's road. They got the little ship in the trough, somehow, under more sail than she could stand up to ; the main-topmast went ; it brought down the fore-topmast, which wrecked the bowsprit and jib-boom. The Spaniards ran about like madmen, some of them crossing themselves, and praying about the decks ; others bawling in a manner to terrify all hands, though I can't tell ye what was said ; the ship was in a horrible mess with wreckage, which nobody attempted to clear away. It blew very hard, and the seas were bursting in smoke over the brigantine, that lay unmanageable. At last the boatswain of her, holding a sounding-rod in his hand, yelled out something, and there was a rush for the boats stowed amidships. They were so crazy with fear they hardly knew how to swing 'em over the side. Ruddiman says to me : "I shall stick to the ship. If those boats are not swamped, they'll blow away, and her people'll starve, and our late job in that line is quite enough for me." I said I would stick by the ship, too, and we stood watching whilst the Spaniards got their boats over. It was luck, and not management, that set the little craft afloat. The captain roaring out, made signs to us to come ; but we, pointing to the sea, made motions to signify that they would be capsized and shook our heads. They were mad with fright, and weren't going to stay to argue, and in twos and threes at a time they sprang into the boats like rats ; and whether they took food and water with them I can't tell ye ; but this I know, that within twenty minutes of the Spanish bo'sun's singing out, the two boats had disappeared, and Mr. Ruddiman and me were alone.'

He rose as he said this, and fell to pacing the cabin floor in silence, with his head drooped, and his arms hanging up and down like pump handles.

'A very interesting story, captain, so far as it goes,' said I, shifting a bit on my seat, as though I supposed that the end was not far off now. 'Of course you were taken off by some passing vessel ?'

He made no reply to this, nor, indeed, seemed to heed me.

After several turns, he stopped, and looked me in the face, and continued to stare with a knitted brow, as though he were returning to his first resolution to communicate his secret with an effort that fell little short of mental anguish. He came slowly to his chair, and started afresh.

'We sounded the well, and presently discovered that the water she was taking in drained through the decks, and that she was tight enough in her bottom; and we reckoned that if we could get her out of the trough, she'd live buoyant; so we searched for the carpenter's chest, and found it, and let fly at the raffle with a chopper apiece, and after a bit, cleared the vessel of the wrecked spars and muddle, and got her to look up to it, and she made middling good weather, breasting it prettily under a tarpaulin seized in the weather main rigging. The gale blew itself out after twenty-four hours, and the wind shifted into the east'ards. We let drop the foresail; there was no more canvas on her to set, with the head of the mast gone, and with it the peak halliards and the sail in rags. Our notion was to head for the Sandwich Islands, for we stood by so doing to fall in with a whaler, and failing help of that sort there was civilisation over at Hawaii; but t'others of the Polynesian rocks were mostly cannibal islands, we believed, and we were for giving them a wide berth. Yet we could do nothing but blow before it. *That* you'll understand, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Quite,' said I.

'It came on thick,' he continued, speaking with intensity and in an utterance deep, clear, and loud, 'with a bit of a swell from the east'ards and a fresh wind singing over it. I was at the hellum in the afternoon, and Ruddiman lay asleep close against the companion hatch. I was drowsy for want of rest, and there was sleep enough in my eyes to make me see very ill. Suddenly looking ahead, I caught sight of a sort of whitish shadow, and even whilst I was staring at it, wondering whether it was vapour or white water, it took shape as a low coral island, with clumps of trees here and there and a small rise of greenish land amidships of it. I put the hellum hard over, and called to Ruddiman, who jumps up and takes a look. "A dead lee-shore, Braine," says he; "what's to be done? There's no clawing off under this canvas." What *was* to be done? The land lay in a stretch of reef right along our beam, with the brigantine's head falling off again to the drag of the foresail, spite of the hellum being hard down. In less than twenty minutes she struck, was took by the swell, and drove hard aground, and lay fixed on her bilge with her deck aslope to the beach that was within an easy jump from the rail.'

He broke off, and went in a restless, feverish way to the table and unlocked and drew out a drawer, looked at something within, then shut the drawer with a convulsive movement of the arm and turned the key. I was now heartily wishing he would make an end. Down to this, the tale was just a commonplace narrative of marine suffering, scarcely reclaimed from insipidity by the singu-

larity of the figure that recited it. But that was not quite it. I was under a constant fear of the next piece of behaviour he might exhibit, and my alarm was considerably increased by the air of mystery with which he had examined the drawer and hurriedly closed it, as though to satisfy himself that the weapon he had lodged there was still in its place. Having locked the drawer, he stood thinking a little, then taking up his Bible from the table, he approached me with it.

'Mr. Dugdale,' he exclaimed, 'before I can go on, I must have ye kiss this here book to an oath. Take it!' he cried with a sudden fierceness; 'hold it, and now follow me.'

'Stop a minute,' I said; 'you are telling me a story that I have really no particular desire to hear. You have no right to exact an oath from me upon a matter that I cannot possibly be in the smallest degree interested in.'

'It's to come,' said he in a raven note; 'ye shall be interested afore long. Take the oath, sir,' he added with a dark look.

'But what oath, man, what oath is it that I am to take?'

'That as the Lord is now a-listening to ye, you will never divulge to mortal creature the secret I'm agoing to tell ye, so help you God: and if you break your oath, may ye be struck dead at the moment of it, and your soul chased to the very gates of hell. So help ye God, again!'

I looked at him with astonishment and fear. No pen could express his manner as he pronounced these words—the dull fire that entered his eyes and seemed to enlarge them yet, the solemn note his deep and trembling, yet distinctly clear, voice took—his mien of command that had the force of a menace in it as he stood upreared before me, his nostrils wide, his face a dingy sallow, one arm thrusting the little volume at me, the other hanging at his side with the fingers clenched.

'I dare not take that oath,' said I, after a little spell of thinking, with every nerve in me tight-strung, so to speak, in readiness to defend myself should he attack me. 'Miss Temple will certainly inquire what our talk has been about; I will not undertake to be silent to her, sir. Keep your secret. It is not too late. Your narrative is one of shipwreck, and so far there is nothing in it to betray.'

With that I rose.

'Stop!' he exclaimed; 'you may tell the lady. There need be no objection. I see how it lies betwixt you and her, and I'm not so onreasonable as to reckon she'll never be able to coax it out of ye. No. Your interests 'll be hers, and of course she goes along with us. 'Tis my crew I'm thinking of.'

I was horribly puzzled. At the same time, curiosity was growing in me; and with the swiftness of thought I reflected that whether I had his secret or not it would be all the same; he was most assuredly a madman in this direction, anyhow, if not in others; and it could be nothing more than some insane fancy

which he had it in his head to impart, and which might be worth hearing if only for the sake of recalling it as an incident of this adventure when Miss Temple and I should have got away from the barque.

'Mr. Dugdale, you will swear, sir,' he exclaimed.

'Very well,' said I; 'but put it a little more mildly, please. Leave out the gates of hell, for instance; or see—suffer me to swear in my own way. Give me that book.'

I observed that his hand was trembling violently as I took the volume from him.

'I swear,' I said, 'to keep secret from all mortal persons in this world saving Miss Temple whatever it is your intention now to tell me. So help me God,' and I put the book to my lips. 'That oath excludes your crew,' I added, 'and I hope you're satisfied?'

His face took a little complexion of life, and he almost smiled.

'It'll do—oh yes, it'll do,' he exclaimed. 'I knew I could count upon you. Now then for it.'

He resumed his seat, and leaning towards me with his unwinking eyes fixed upon my face as usual, he proceeded thus.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CAPTAIN MAKES A PROPOSAL

'Mr. Ruddiman and I got ashore and walked a little way up the beach, to see what sort of spot we had been cast away on. It was a small island, betwixt two and three miles long, and about a mile wide in the middle of it. There were no natives to be seen. We might be sure that it was uninhabited. There was nothing to eat upon it, and though we spent the hours till it came on dark in searching for fresh water, we found none. This made us resolve to land all we could out of the brigantine when daylight should arrive. The weather cleared at midnight, the stars shone, and the sea smoothed down with a light swell from the north-west, which the trend of the reef shouldered off and left the water about the stranded craft calm. As soon as daylight came we got aboard, and rigged a whip on the fore-yardarm, and by noon we had landed provisions enough, along with fresh water and wines and spirits in jars, to last us two men for three months; but that didn't satisfy us. There was no other land in sight all round the horizon; we were without a boat; and though, if the vessel broke up, we had made up our minds to turn to and save as much of her as we could handle that might wash ashore, so as to have the materials for a raft at hand if it should come to it, we hadn't the heart to talk of such a thing then, in the middle of that wide ocean, with such a sun as was shining over our heads all day, and the sure chance of the first of any squall or bit of dirty weather that might come along

adrowning of us. So we continued to break out all we could come at. We worked our way out of the hold into the lazarette, and after we had made a trifle of clearance there, we came across three chests heavily padlocked and clamped with iron. "What's here?" says Mr. Ruddiman. "If these ain't treasure-chests like to what the Spanish marchants sends away gold in along the coast my eyes ain't mates," he says. He went away to the carpenter's chest, and returned with a crow and a big hammer, and let fly at one of the padlocks, and struck a staple off short. We lifted the lid, and found the chest full of Spanish pieces of gold. The other two was the same, full up with minted gold; and we reckoned that in all three chests there couldn't be less in the value of English money than a hundred and eighty to two hundred thousand pounds! It wasn't to be handled in the chests; so we made parcels of it in canvas wrappers; and by the time the dusk drew down we had landed every farden of it.'

Once more he broke off and went to the drawer. I watched him with profound anxiety, incapable of imagining what he was about to produce, and collecting all my faculties, so to speak, ready for whatever was to come. He took from the drawer, however, nothing more alarming than a piece of folded parchment, round which some green tape was tied. This he opened with trembling hands, smoothed out the sheet of parchment upon the table, and invited me to approach. The outline, formed of thick strokes of ink, represented an island. Its shape had something of the look of a bottle with the neck of it broken away. It lay due north and south according to the points of the compass marked by hand upon the parchment; and towards the north end of it, on the eastern side, there was a somewhat spacious indent, signifying, as I suppose, a lagoon. Over the face of this outline were a number of crosses irregularly dotted about to express vegetation. In the centre of the lagoon was a black spot like a little blot of ink, with an arrow pointing from it to another little blot in the heart of the island bearing due east from the mark in the indent or lagoon. In the corner of the sheet of parchment were written in a bold hand the figures, Long. 120° 3′ W.; Lat. 33° 6′ S.

'This,' said he, in a voice vibratory with excitement and emotion, 'is the island.' I inclined my head. 'You see how it lies, sir,' he continued, pointing with a shaking forefinger to the latitude and longitude of the place in the corner. 'Easter Island bears due north-east from it. That will be the nearest land. Supposing you start from Valparaiso, a due west-by-south course would run you stem on to the reef.'

I waited for him to proceed. He drew away by a step, that he might keep his eyes upon my face, whilst he continued to hold his trembling forefinger pressed down upon his little chart.

'We agreed to bury the gold,' he said; 'to hide it somewhere where we should be easily able to find it when we came to look for it, if so be as providence should ever allow us to come off with

our lives from this destitute reef. D'ye see this hollow, Mr. Dugdale?'

'A lagoon, I suppose?' said I.

'Yes. This here mark amidships of it'—he turned his dead black eyes upon the chart—'signifies a coral pillar about twice as thick as my mainmast, rising out of the water to about fourteen foot. We reckoned that there was no force in nature outside an airthquake to level such a shaft as that, and Mr. Ruddiman and me took it for a mark. We landed the brigantine's compass, and having hit on a clump of trees, found they bore east three-quarters south from that there coral pillar. We fixed upon a tree, and after trying again and again, made it exactly two hundred and eight paces from the wash of the water in the curve of the lagoon. There we buried the money, sir.'

'And there it is now, I suppose?' said I.

'Hard upon two hundred thousand pounds,' he exclaimed, letting the words drop from his lips as though they were of lead. 'Think of it, sir.'

He folded up the sheet of parchment, always with a very trembling hand, replaced it in the drawer, which he locked; and then, after steadfastly gazing at me for some little while, an expression of energy entered his face, and he seemed to quicken from his eyes to his very toes.

'All that money is mine,' said he, 'and I want you to help me recover it.'

'I!'

'Yes, you, Mr. Dugdale. You and me'll do it between us. And I'll tell ye how, if you'll listen——'

'But, my dear sir,' I exclaimed, 'I suppose you recollect that you are under a solemn promise to Miss Temple and myself to transfer us to the first homeward-bound ship we meet.'

'I can't help that,' he cried with a hint of ferocity in his manner. 'There's this here fortune to be recovered first. After we've got it, home won't be fur off.'

Come, thought I, I must be cool and apparently careless.

'It is very good of you, Captain Braine, to wish me to participate in this treasure; but really, my dear sir, I have no title to any portion of it; besides, I am a man of independent means, and what I possess is quite as much as I require.'

'Ye'll not refuse it when ye see it,' he exclaimed. 'Money's money; and in this here world, where money signifies everything, —love, happiness, pleasure, everything you can name—who's the man that's agoing to tell me he can get too much of it?'

'But you haven't completed your story,' said I, strenuously endeavouring to look as though I believed in every word of the mad trash he had been communicating.

'As much as is necessary,' said he. 'I want to come to business, sir. I could keep you listening for hours whilst I told ye of our life aboard that island, how the brigantine went to pieces, how one

day Mr. Ruddiman went for a swim in the lagoon, and how the cramp or some fit took him, and he sunk with me a-looking on, being no swimmer, and incapable of giving him any help.'

'And how long were you on the island?' said I.

'Four months and three days. It was one morning that I crawled from the little hut we had built ourselves out of some of the brigantine's wreckage that had drifted ashore, and saw a small man-of-war with her tops'l aback just off the island. She was a Yankee surveying craft, and a boat was coming off when I first see her. They took me aboard, and landed me at Valparaiso two months later. But all that's got nothing to do with what I want to talk to ye about. I've got now to recover this money, and I mean to have it, and you'll help me to get it, Mr. Dugdale.'

'But why have you waited all this time before setting about to recover this treasure?' said I.

'I never had a chance of doing it afore,' he replied; 'but it's come now, and I don't mean to lose it.'

'What is your scheme?'

'As easy,' he cried, 'as the digging up of the money'll be. I shall head straight away for Rio, and there discharge all my crew, then take in a few runners to navigate the vessel to the Sandwich Islands, where I'll ship a small company of Kanakas, just as many as'll help us to sail the *Lady Blanche* to my island. I shan't fear *them*. Kanakas ain't Europeans; they're as simple as babies; and we can do a deal that they'll never dream of taking notice of.'

I listened with a degree of astonishment and consternation it was impossible for me to conceal in my face; yet I managed to preserve a steady voice.

'But you have a cargo consigned to Port Louis, I presume?' said I. 'You don't mean to run away with this ship, do you? for that would be an act of piracy punishable with the gallows, as I suppose you know?'

He eyed me steadily and squarely.

'I don't mean to run away with this ship,' he answered; 'I know my owners, and what they'll think. It'll be a deviation that ain't going to interfere with the ultimate delivery of my cargo at Port Louis, and I don't suppose it'll take me much time to fix upon a sum that'll make my owners very well pleased with the delay, and quite willing that I should do it again on the same tarms.'

'But why do you desire to bring me into this business?' I exclaimed, startled by the intelligence I found in this last answer of his.

'Because I can trust ye. You're a gentleman, and you'll be satisfied with the share we'll settle upon. Where am I to find a sailor capable of helping me to navigate this ship that I could feel any confidence in, that I could talk to about this here gold with the sartinty that he wouldn't play me some devilish trick? *Can't* ye see my position, Mr. Dugdale?' he cried with a wild, almost

pathetic air of eagerness and pleading. 'I can't work out such a traverse as this alone. I must have somebody alongside of me that I can confide in. Once the money's aboard, we can rid ourselves of the Kanaka crew, and ship a company of white men for the run to the Mauritius. The gold'll be aboard and it'll be my secret and yourn.'

Though I never doubted for a moment that all this was the emission of some mad, fixed humour, I was yet willing to go on questioning him as if I was interested, partly that he might think me sincere in my profession of belief in his tale, and partly that I might plumb his intentions to the very bottom; for it was certain that, lie or no lie, his fancy of buried treasure was a profound reality to his poor brains, and that it would influence him, as though it were the truth, to heaven alone knew what issue of hardship and fatefulness and even destruction to Miss Temple and me.

'I presume,' said I, assuming an off-hand manner, 'that your men have signed for the run to Port Louis and back?'

'Well, sir?'

'How are you going to get rid of them at Rio?'

'Half of them will run, and the rest I shall know how to start.'

'But what excuse will you have for putting into Rio?'

'Want of a chief mate,' he answered, in a deep sepulchral voice.

This threw me all aback again, and thoroughly confounded me. Indeed, I was well enough acquainted with the sea to guess that he was within the truth when he spoke of an easy quittance of the crew at Rio; and assuredly in the want of a chief mate he could find a reason for heading to that South American port, against which it would be impossible for his sailors to find anything to urge, supposing, a thing not to be taken into account, that they had it in their power to insist upon his sailing straight for Mauritius.

But even as I sat looking at him in an interval of silence that fell upon us, a thought entered my head that transformed what was just now a dark, most sinister menace, into a bright prospect of deliverance. As matters stood—particularly now that I had his so-called secret—I could not flatter myself that he would suffer me to leave his ship for a homeward-bound craft, or even for the *Countess Ida* herself, if we should heave her into sight. Consequently, my best, perhaps the only, chance for myself and the girl who looked to me for protection and safety must lie in this madman making for a near port, where it would be strange indeed if I did not find a swift opportunity of getting ashore with Miss Temple. I saw by the expression in his own face that he instantly observed the change in mine. He extended his hand.

'Mr. Dugdale, you will entertain it? I see it grows upon ye.'

'It is a mighty unexpected proposal,' said I, giving him my fingers to hold. 'I don't like the scheme it involves of running

away with the ship—the deviation, as you term it, which to my mind is a piratical proceeding. But if you will sign a document to the effect that I acted under compulsion, that I was in your power, and obliged to go with you in consequence of your refusal to transfer me to another ship—if, in short, you will draw up some instrument signed by yourself and witnessed by Miss Temple that may help to absolve me from all complicity in this so-termed deviation, I will consent to accompany you to your island. But I must also know what share I am to expect?'

'A third,' he cried feverishly. 'I'll put that down in writing, too, on a separate piece of paper. As to t'other document, draw it up yourself, and I'll copy it and put my name to it, for I han't got the language for such a job. He paused, and then said, 'Is it settled?'

'It will be settled,' I answered, 'when those two formal documents are made out and signed.'

'That can be done at once,' he cried, with profound excitement working in every limb of him, and agitating his face into many singular twitchings and almost convulsive dilatations of the sockets of his eyes.

'Give me leave to think a little,' said I. 'I will have a talk with Miss Temple and settle with her the terms of the absolving letter you are to write and sign.'

'How long will it take ye?' he asked with painful anxiety.

'I shall hope to be ready for you before noon to-morrow,' I replied.

'All right,' said he; 'the moment it *is* settled I'll change my course.'

I took his track-chart and opened it, and with a pair of compasses that lay on the table measured the distance betwixt the point at which we had arrived at noon and Rio. Roughly speaking, and allowing an average of a hundred and fifty miles a day to the barque, I computed that the run would occupy between ten and twelve days.

'What are ye looking for?' he asked suspiciously.

'To see how far Rio is from us,' I answered.

'Well, and what d'ye make it?'

'Call it fifteen hundred miles,' I responded. He nodded in a sort of cunning emphatic way. 'Nothing remains to be said, I think?' said I, making a step to the door.

'Only this,' said he. 'I *was* thinking of asking ye to keep my lookout, acting, as you will be, as my chief mate, but on consideration I believe it'll be best to wait till we've got a new crew afore ye take that duty. Not that the men could object to my calling into Rio on the grounds that you're aboard and are good enough as a navigator to sarve my turn; because they reckon that you're to be transhipped along with the lady at the first opportunity. But it'll be safest, I allow, for you to remain as ye are this side of Rio.'

'Very well,' said I; 'but I can continue to take observations if you like.'

'Oh yes; there can be no harm in that,' he answered.

I opened the door.

'Mr. Dugdale,' he exclaimed, softening his voice into a hoarse whisper with a sudden expression of real insanity in the gloomy, almost threatening look he fastened upon me, 'ye'll recollect the oath you've taken, if you please.'

'Captain Braine,' I replied with an assumption of haughtiness, 'I am a gentleman first of all, and my oath merely follows;' and slightly bowing, I closed the door upon him.

By this time it was nearly dark. I had scarcely noticed the drawing down of the evening whilst in the captain's cabin, so closely had my attention been attached to him and his words. Indeed, the man had detained me an hour with his talk, owing to his pausings and silent intervals of staring; though the substance of his speech and our conversation could have been easily packed into a quarter that time. I went half-way up the companion steps, but feeling thirsty, descended again to drink from a jug that stood upon a swinging tray. Whilst I filled the glass, my eye at the moment happening to be idly bent aft, I observed the door of the cabin adjoining that of Captain Braine's to open and a man's head showed. It instantly vanished. It was too gloomy to allow me to make sure. However, next moment the young fellow Wilkins came out, no doubt guessing that I had seen him, and that he had therefore better show himself honestly.

I was somewhat startled by the apparition, wondering if the fellow had been in the berth throughout our talk, for if so, it was not to be questioned but that he had overheard every syllable, for there was nothing between the cabins but a wooden bulkhead, and the captain's utterance had been singularly clear, deep and loud. But a moment's reflection convinced me that even if he had heard everything, his knowledge (supposing he carried the news forward) would only help to persuade the men that Captain Braine was a madman, and facilitate any efforts I might have to make to deliver myself and Miss Temple from this situation, should Braine's craziness increase and his lunatic imagination take a new turn. So, that the fellow might not think that I took any special notice of his coming out of that cabin, I asked him in a careless way when supper would be ready. He answered that he was now going to lay the table; and without further words I went on deck.

It was a hot and lovely evening, with a range of mountainous but fine-weather clouds in the west, whose heads swelled in scarlet to the fires of the sun sinking into the sea behind them. In the east the shadow was of a deep liquid blue, with the low-lying stars already coming into their places. The breeze blew softly off the starboard beam, and the barque, clothed in canvas to the height of her trucks and to the outmost points of her far-reaching studding-sail booms, was floating quietly and softly, like some spirit-shape

of ship, through the rich and tender tropic blending of night-dyes and westering lights.

Miss Temple stood at the rail, leaning upon her arms, apparently watching the water sliding past. She sprang erect when I pronounced her name.

'I was beginning to fear you would never come on deck again,' she exclaimed as she looked at me with a passionate eagerness of inquiry. 'How long you have been! What could he have found to say to detain you all this while?'

'Softly!' I said, with a glance at old Lush, who was patrolling the forward end of the poop athwartships with his hands deep buried in his breeches' pockets, and with a sulky air in the round of his back and the droop of his head. 'I have heard some strange things. If you are not tired, take my arm, and we will walk a little. We are less likely to be overheard in the open air than if we conversed in the silence of the cabin.'

'You do not look miserable,' she exclaimed. 'I expected to see you emerge with a pale face and alarmed eyes. Now, please tell me everything.'

There was something almost of a caress in her manner of taking my arm, as though she could not suppress some little exhibition of pleasure in having me at her side again. Also she seemed to find relief in the expression on my face. She had been full of dark forebodings, and my light smiling manner instantly soothed her.

I at once started to tell her everything that had passed between Captain Braine and myself. I contrived to recite the skipper's yarn as though I fully believed it, always taking care to sober my voice down to little more than a whisper as we alternately approached the fellow at the wheel and the carpenter at the other end in our pendulum walk. Her fine eyes glowed with atonishment; never did her beauty show with so much perfection to the animation of the wonder, the incredulity, the excitement raised by the narrative I gave her.

'So *that* is his secret?' she exclaimed, drawing a breath like a sigh as I concluded, halting at the rail to gaze at her with a smile. 'I presume now, Mr. Dugdale, that you are satisfied he is mad?'

'Perfectly satisfied.'

'You do not believe a word of his story?'

'Not a syllable of it.'

'And yet it might be true!' said she.

'And even then I would not believe it,' I answered.

'Did he explain how it was that all that gold lay hidden in a poor ship like the Spanish brigand—brig—whatever you call it?' she asked, her curiosity as a woman dominating for a moment all other considerations which might grow out of that yarn.

'No,' said I; 'nor would I inquire. It is giving one's self needless trouble to dissect the fabric of a dream.'

'Poor wretch! But how frightful to be in a ship commanded by a madman! What object has he in telling you this secret?'

'He wants me to help him recover the treasure;' and I then related the man's proposals.

She gazed at me with so much alarm that I imagined her fear had rendered her speechless.

'You tell me,' she cried, 'that you have consented to sail with him to this island of his in—in—the Pacific? Are you as mad as he is, Mr. Dugdale? Do you forget that I look to you to protect me and help me to return home?'

Her eyes sparkled; the colour mounted to her cheek, her bosom rose and fell to the sudden gust of temper.

'I am surprised that you do not see my motive,' I exclaimed. 'Of course I feigned to fall in with his views. My desire is to get to Rio as soon as possible, and ship with you thence for England.'

'To Rio? But I'm not going to Rio!' she cried. 'The captain solemnly promised to put me on board the first ship going home. Why did you not insist upon his keeping his word?' she exclaimed, drawing herself up to her fullest stature and towering over me with a flashing stare.

'He'll not tranship us now,' said I. 'I'm like Caleb Williams. I have his secret, and he'll not lose sight of me.'

'Oh, what miserable judgment!' she exclaimed. 'You are frightened of him! But were he ten times madder than he is, I would *compel* him to keep his word. Rio indeed! He shall put us on board the first ship we meet, and I'll tell him so when I see him.'

'You will do nothing of the kind,' said I. 'If you open your lips or suffer your temper to come between me and any project I have formed, I will wash my hands of all responsibility. I will not lift a finger to help ourselves. He shall carry us whithersoever he pleases.'

'How can you talk to me so heartlessly! I have no friend but you now, and you are turning from me, and making me feel utterly alone.'

'I am so much your friend,' said I, 'that I do not intend you shall alienate me. My judgment is going to serve me better than yours in this dilemma. I know exactly what I am about and what I intend, and you must keep quiet and be obedient to my wishes.'

'Oh, I should abhor you at any other time for talking to me like that!' she exclaimed. 'There was a time—— I shall *not* go to Rio! He has promised to put us on board a ship going home.'

'Miss Temple, you talk intemperately. You are in an unreasonable mood, and I will not converse with you. We will resume the subject by-and-by;' and I half turned, as though to walk off, humming an air betwixt my teeth.

She grasped my arm. 'You must not leave me. I have been long enough alone. I believe you will drive me as crazy as the captain.'

'I will see you safely to England first,' said I, 'and then you shall fall crazy.'

The tears suddenly gushed into her eyes, and she turned seawards to hide her face. I moved away, but before I had measured half-a-dozen paces, her hand was again upon my arm.

'I am sorry, she said softly, hanging her stately head, 'if I have said anything to vex you.'

'I desire but one end,' said I, 'and that is your safety. To ensure it needs but a little exercise of tact on your part and a resolution to trust me.'

'I do trust you,' she exclaimed; 'but am I wholly wanting in brains, that you will not suffer me to offer an opinion, nay, even to express a regret?'

'You would be able to do nothing with this mad sailor,' said I. 'Rio is within a fortnight's sail, and our safety depends upon our getting there.'

'A fortnight!' she cried—'another fortnight of this horrible ship!'

'Yes; but England is a long way off from where we are. Were you to get on board another vessel, you might be fully as uncomfortable as you are here, unless she should prove a passenger craft with ladies in her. A fortnight more or less could not signify. At Rio you will be able to purchase such articles as you immediately need, and there will be a choice of ships to carry us home in comfort.'

'I believe you are right,' said she, after a little pause, with something of timidity in the lift of her eyes to my face. 'I was shocked and made irritable by alarm. I am sorry, Mr. Dugdale.'

The answer I was about to make was checked by Wilkins calling to us from the companion way that supper was ready.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FORM OF AGREEMENT

THE captain did not arrive, and we had the table to ourselves. Miss Temple was subdued, and her glances almost wistful. It gave me but little pleasure to humble her, or in any way to triumph over her: but I had made up my mind to be master whilst we were together, and not to spare her feelings in my effort to assert myself; and I may add here that I had determined, if it pleased God to preserve us, to make this noble and beautiful woman my wife. For I was now loving her, but so secretly, that my love was scarce like a passion even to my own reason; and the conclusion I had formed was that the only road to her heart lay behind the armour of her pride, which must be broken down and demolished if ever I was to gain her affection. And sure I was of this too; that she was of that kind of women who need to be bowed by a strong hand into a submissive posture before they can be won.

We spoke very little; the captain's cabin was not far off, and

the knowledge of his being in it held us very taciturn. However, we made amends for our silence after we had supped and regained the deck. She was now to be easily convinced that our best chance of escaping from this barque was for me to fool the captain to the top of his bent, that he might carry us to Rio ; and before long she was even talking cheerfully of our prospects, asking me in a half-laughing way how we were to manage for money when we arrived at Rio, whether I had any friends there, and so on.

'There are my jewels,' she said ; 'but I should be very sorry to part with them.'

'There will be no need to do that,' said I. 'I have a few bank-notes in my pocket which I think may suffice. There is an English consul, I suppose, at Rio, and he will advise us.'

Talk of this kind heartened her wonderfully. It gave her something happy and hopeful to think about ; in fact, before we went below she told me that she now preferred the idea of proceeding to Rio to the old scheme of going aboard a ship bound to England.

'I shall be able to purchase a few comforts,' she said ; 'whereas I might be transferred to some horrid little vessel that would occupy weeks in crawling along the sea, and in all that time I should be as badly off as I am now. Do the ladies in South America dress picturesquely, do you know ? I should like to be romantically attired on my arrival home. How my dearest mother would stare ! What colour a long Spanish veil and a dress of singular fashion would give to my story of our adventures.'

And so she talked.

It was a very calm and lovely night, with the moon, a few days old, going down in the west. The breeze held everything silent aloft ; a murmur as of the raining of a fountain floated up from alongside as the white body of the little barque slipped through the darkling waters brimming in a firm black line to the spangled sky of the horizon. The captain had arrived on deck at eight, but he kept to the after-part of the poop, nor once addressed us, often standing motionless for ten minutes at a time, till he looked like some ebony statue at the rail floating softly up and down against the stars to the delicate curtseying of his little ship. I seemed to notice, however, yet without giving much heed to the thing, an indisposition on the part of the watch on deck to coil themselves away for their usual fine-weather naps. From time to time, though dimly, there would steal aft a hum of voices from the black shadow upon the deck past the galley. Once a man kindled a phosphorus match to light his pipe, and a small group of faces showed to the flash of the flame, so to speak, as it soared and sank to the fellow's sucking at it ; but I found nothing in this to arrest my attention saving that I recollect asking Miss Temple to notice the odd effect produced by the coming out of those faces amid the dusk ; for one saw *them* only and no other portion of the men's bodies.

We walked to the companion to leave the deck. I scarcely knew whether or not to call a good-night to the captain, so absorbed

in thought did his motionless posture express him. But as Miss Temple put her foot upon the steps, he quietly cried out: 'Are ye going to bed?'

'Yes, captain,' I answered, 'and we wish you a very good-night.'

'A minute!' he sung out, and came to us. He seemed to peer into Miss Temple's face, that showed as a mere faint glimmer in the starlight, the moon being then sunk, and addressing me, exclaimed in a voice but a little above a whisper, 'I suppose you have told the lady everything, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Yes,' I answered; 'my oath allowed for that, you know.'

'Certainly,' said he. 'It's a grand opportunity for money-getting, mem. The brace of you know more than the wife of my own bosom has any suspicion of. As God's my Saviour, never once have I opened my lips to Mrs. Braine about that there money.'

'I had hoped you would have transferred me to a homeward-bound ship,' said Miss Temple.

'You don't want to be separated from your sweetheart, do you?' he exclaimed.

This was a stroke to utterly silence her. I believe she had spoken from no other motive than to finesse, that the captain might suppose her as sincere in her belief of his story as I was; but this word *sweetheart* was like a blast of lightning. What her face would have exhibited if there had been light enough to see it by, I could only imagine.

'It grows late, captain; good-night,' said I, pitying her for the confusion and disorder which I knew she would be under.

'Have you been thinking over the tarms of that letter we were talking about?' said he.

'Yes,' I answered, 'I'll pay your cabin a visit after breakfast and write it out.'

'Very well, sir. That and the agreement about the division of the money too. I shall want to shift my hellum for Rio to-morrow.'

He left us, and we descended in silence, nor did Miss Temple speak a word to me as we made our way to our gloomy deep-sunk quarters, excepting to wish me good-night.

I slept well, and rose next morning at seven to get a bath in the head; for, as in the Indiaman, so in this barque, and so, indeed, in most ships in those days, there was a little pump fixed in the bows for washing down the decks of the fore-part of the craft. It was a very gay brilliant morning, a fresh breeze about a point before the starboard beam, and the *Lady Blanche* was moving through it at a meteoric pace with her royals and gaff topsail in, and all else save the flying jib abroad. The water was of a rich blue, and rolled in snow; the violet shadows of swollen steam-coloured clouds swept over the rolling lines of the ocean, and by their alternations of the sunshine made a very prism of the vast, throbbing disc of the deep. About two miles astern was a large schooner, staggering along on a

westerly course, so close hauled that she seemed to look into the very eye of the wind and plunging bow under with a constant boiling of foam all about her head. By the time I had taken my bath she was a mere chip of white on the windy blue over our weather quarter.

There were a few sailors cleaning up about the decks, and as I passed them on the road to the cabin, I could not fail to observe that they eyed me with a degree of attention I had never before noticed in them. Their looks were full of curiosity, with something almost of impudence in the bold stare of one or two of them. What, I reflected, can this signify but that the fellow Wilkins overheard everything that passed between the captain and me, and has carried the news into the forecastle? So much the better, I thought; for should the captain come to guess that the men had his secret, the suspicion must harden him in his insane resolve to carry the barque forthwith to Rio to get rid of his crew.

When Miss Temple came out of her berth there was a momentary touch of bashfulness and even of confusion in her manner; then a laughing expression flashed into her eye. As we repaired to the cabin we exchanged some commonplaces about the weather. She warmed up a little when I spoke of the noble breeze and of the splendid pace of the barque, and assured her that the most distant port in the world could never be far off to people aboard such a clipper keel as this. The captain joined us at the breakfast table. I thought he looked unusually haggard and pale, appearing as a man might after a long spell of bitter mental conflict. His eyes seemed preternaturally large, and of a duller and deader black than my recollection found common in them. He seldom spoke but to answer the idle conversational questions one or the other of us put to him. I observed that he drank thirstily and ate but little, and that he would occasionally rest his forehead upon his hand as though to soothe a pain there. Yet lustreless as was his gaze, it was singularly eager and devouring in its steadfastness. He had been on deck since four o'clock, he told us, and had not closed his eyes during the previous four hours of his watch below.

'I get but little sleep now,' said he with a long trembling sigh.

'That schooner astern this morning,' said I, 'looked as if she were bound somewhere Rio way.'

He responded with a dull nod of indifference.

'Were you ever at Rio, Captain Braine?' asked Miss Temple.

'No, mem.'

'I suppose I shall easily find a ship there to carry me home?' said she.

He stared at her and then at me; and then said, looking at her again, 'Don't you mean to go along with him?' indicating me with a sideways jerk of the head.

Her eyes sought mine for counsel.

'It will be a question for you and me to discuss, captain,' said I. 'With all due deference to Miss Temple, it may be you will

come to think that the presence of a lady could but encumber us in such a job as we have in hand.'

'Ay, but she has my secret!' said he swiftly and warmly.

'Your secret is mine, and my interests are hers—you know that!' I exclaimed.

'What are the relations between you?' he asked.

A blush overspread Miss Temple's face and her eyes fell.

'Ask me that question presently, captain,' said I, laughing.

He continued to stare slowly at one or the other of us, but remained silent.

Wilkins entered with a pot of coffee. I furtively but attentively surveyed his expressionless veal-like countenance; but I might as well have explored the sole of his foot for hints of what was passing in his mind. He came and went quickly. Indeed, his practice of waiting consisted merely in placing our meals upon the table, and then lingering out upon the quarter-deck within hearing of the captain's voice if he was wanted.

Presently the skipper rose.

'I've made out that document concarning shares,' said he; 'perhaps you might now come with me and concoct the letter you want me to sign.'

'Very well,' I answered; 'Miss Temple is to witness your signature, and you will allow her to accompany us?'

For answer he gave her one of his astonishing bows, and the three of us went to his cabin. He opened the drawer that contained the chart of his island, and produced a sheet of paper, very oddly scrawled over.

'I made this up last evening,' said he; 'jest see if it'll do, Mr. Dugdale. If so, I'll sign it, and ye can draw me up a copy for my own keeping.'

'Miss Temple will have to witness this too,' said I, 'so I'll read it aloud:

"Barque *Lady Blanche*.

At Sea (*such and such a date*).

I, John Braine, master of the barque *Lady Blanche*, do hereby agree with Dugdale, Esquire, that in consideration of his serving me as chief officer for a voyage to an island situate in the South Pacific Ocean, latitude 33° 16′S. longitude 120° 3′W., onnamed, but bearing due south-west from Easter Island distant ; I say that in consideration of your helping me to navigate this ship to that there island, and from there to Port Louis in the island of Mauritius afterwards, the said John Braine do hereby undertake to give and secure to the said Dugdale, Esquire, by this here instrument as witnessed, one whole and full third of the money now lying buried in the above-said island, whereof the amount, as by calculation allowed, is in Spanish pieces from 180 to 200,000 pounds.

Witness my hand and seal."'

It cost me a prodigious effort to keep my face whilst I read,

almost tragical as was the significance of this absurd document to Miss Temple and myself, as forming a condition, so to speak, of the extraordinary adventure fate had put us upon. I durst not look at her for fear of bursting into a laugh. The man's strange eyes were fixed upon me.

'Nothing could be better,' said I. 'Now, sir, if you will kindly sign it—and I will ask you, Miss Temple, to witness it.'

He turned to seat himself; the girl's glance met mine; but heaven knows there was no hint of merriment in *her* face. She was colourless and agitated, though I could perceive that she had a good grip of her emotions. The captain signed his name with a great scratching noise of his pen, then made way for Miss Temple, whose hand slightly trembled as she attached her signature to the precious document. It was now my turn; in a few minutes I had scribbled out a form of letter addressed to myself guaranteeing me immunity from all legal perils which might follow upon the captain's piratical deviation from his voyage. This also he signed, and Miss Temple afterwards put her name to it as a witness.

'I'll take copies of these,' said I, 'at noon, after helping you to work out the sights.'

'I beg pardon,' he exclaimed, observing me to take a step towards the door; 'I should be glad to know the relations 'twixt you and this young lady? It ain't for inquisitiveness that I ask. She has my secret, sir!' and he drew himself erect.

'We were fellow-passengers,' I answered with a side-look at the girl, whose expression was one of disgust and distress.

'There's nothing close in that,' said he; 'I counted upon ye as being sweethearts—that you was keeping company with her, and to be married when the chance came, when I told you there was no objection to your reporting my secret to her.'

'We are sweethearts,' I replied, smiling, and taking the girl's hand; 'and *when* the chance comes along,' I added, faintly accentuating the 'when' for *her* ear only, 'we shall be married, captain, and I shall hope to see you dancing at our wedding and heartily enjoying the entertainment, which it will not need all my third share to furnish forth.'

Miss Temple could not contain herself; she uttered a short hysteric laugh.

'Pity ye couldn't have told me this at once,' exclaimed the captain, regarding me sternly; 'but,' he went on whilst his countenance slightly relaxed, 'there's always sensitiveness in love-making whilst it keeps young. I'm obliged to you, mem, for your visit.'

I opened the door and followed Miss Temple out.

'I am of opinion that he is not so mad as he appears,' said I.

She averted her flushed face somewhat haughtily. No matter, thought I; it is a subject that will keep.

We got under the short awning on the poop and lounged away the morning there. Her good breeding speedily came to her

rescue, and our chat was as easy, in a sense, as ever it could have been aboard the Indiaman—easier, i' faith, by a long chalk! though it concerned troubles and anxieties which never could have occurred to us in the *Countess Ida*. I observed that Mr. Lush frequently directed his eyes at me as he paced the weather deck. To my accost he had satisfied himself with returning a surly 'marning,' and we spoke no more. He seemed unable to view me attentively enough to satisfy himself without growing offensive by staring.

'I hope that fellow,' I whispered to Miss Temple, 'may not thwart my Rio programme. Yet I don't see how he could do so. The barque wants a chief mate, so the captain contends. It is no falsehood; the need would by all sailors be regarded as an imperative one. Still, I hate that surly fellow without exactly knowing why.'

'Do you notice how those men yonder are constantly looking this way?'

'Yes. As I have explained to you, Master Eavesdropper Wilkins has reported all he heard; and the Jacks, understanding at last that their skipper is a madman, are wondering what on earth is going to happen next. They'll be glad, you'll find, to learn that we're heading for Rio when the course is changed. They'll report the skipper as insane, and end our difficulties out of hand for us.'

'I hope so indeed!' she sighed.

Well, for the rest of the day nothing happened worth relating. I took an observation with the captain, worked it out in his cabin, and made draughts of the two extraordinary documents. When we had calculated our situation, he went on deck, and by a tell-tale compass in his cabin I perceived that he had changed the barque's course. Simultaneously with this, I heard the men bracing the yards more forward, and the heel of the barque slightly sharpened to the increased lateral pressure of the fresh breeze upon her canvas. I hastened on deck when I had done my copying to observe the crew's deportment; but in the manner of the few men who were about I witnessed nothing to lead me to suppose that they made anything of this sudden change of course.

When I told Miss Temple that we were now heading as close as the wind would let us lie for the South American port she instantly grew animated; her eyes brightened, a look of hope and pleasure entered her face, and her voice was full of cheerfulness. The captain, on the other hand, grew gloomier as the day advanced. During his watch on deck from twelve to four he paced the planks without any intermission that I was sensible of, walking nearly always in the same posture, with his hands clasped behind him and his head bowed; and with his long black hair, yellow face, and blue gills he needed nothing but the dress of a monk to look one, rehearsing his part for the cloisters.

Some dinner was taken to him on deck; but I saw Wilkins

afterwards carry the dishes forward, and the food appeared to me untouched. At the supper hour he came to the table, but neither ate nor drank. During the greater part of the sitting he kept turning his eyes first on one and then on the other of us with a dim sort of strained interrogative expression in his stare, as though he was struggling with some degree of suffering to dislodge an imagination or idea out of a remote secret cell of his brain and bring it forward into the clear light of his understanding. He seemed to find Miss Temple's presence a restraint. Sometimes, after eyeing me he'd start as if about to speak, but instantly check himself with a glance at the girl, whilst his face would darken to some mood of irritation and impatience.

Another gloriously fine night followed sunset that day, with a brighter and longer-living moon, and a gushing of breeze that melted through and through one with the delicious coolness that it brushed off the waters and gathered from the dew. The sea throbbed in flashings of foam, which shone with the radiance of moon-touched snow mingled with spangles of the gold and emerald light of the phosphor. There was a pleasant roaring and hissing noise off the weather bow, with merry whistlings aloft, where the full-throated canvas soaring to the main-topgallant yard leaned in pale spaces against the stars, with frequent sweeps of the mast-heads to the frisky plungings of the clipper hull upon the head seas.

The carpenter was in charge of the deck. He was standing at the rail abreast of the wheel, when it occurred to me to accost him, that I might gather from his replies what notions had been put into his head by the captain having changed the course. I had Miss Temple on my arm, for the deck was hardly safe for her without some such support. We went to the binnacle, and I took a peep at the card, then crossed over to the carpenter.

'Good-evening, Mr. Lush. A rattling breeze this! Since Rio is our destination, such a draught as this should put us in the way of making it smartly, off her course as the barque is.'

'I suppose you know what we're a-going there for?' he answered in a gruff tone of voice that left me in doubt as to whether he intended a question or not.

'You are second mate, and of course are in the captain's confidence. What should I know that you don't?'

'Ah, what?' he exclaimed, in a voice like a dog's growl.

Miss Temple slightly pressed my arm, as though she would have me walk away.

'A vessel like this wants a chief mate,' said I, 'some one who knows what to do with the sun and stars.'

'Oh, then you're acquainted with the reason why we're going to Rio?' said he in a tone of such impudent sarcasm, that without another word I rounded on my heel and led Miss Temple forward.

'The brute!' I exclaimed. 'But I am rightly served. I have no business to address the surly illiterate baboon.'

'You know that *he* knows you have learnt the captain's motives, if it be true, as you suppose, that Wilkins has repeated to the men what he overheard; why, then, do you feign an ignorance that can only excite the creature's suspicions?'

'Suspicions of what?'

'That you are acting a double part: with the captain for the sake of his buried money, and with the crew for the sake of your safety.'

'You put it shrewdly, and I am fairly hit,' said I. 'I wanted to get at the fellow's mind, if he has any; it did not occur to me for the moment that he would know through Wilkins of what had passed in the cabin. That is to say if he *does* know; for, after all, Wilkins may not have overheard everything, and for aught we can tell he may not have repeated a syllable of the little that he managed to collect through that bulkhead. No matter, Miss Temple. A fortnight more, please God, and we shall be able to write the word finis to this passage of our adventures.'

'I shall scarcely know myself again,' she exclaimed cheerfully, whilst she extended her disengaged white hand to the sheen in the air flowing from the stars and scar of moon, 'when I put my rings on once more. What an experience! How improbable, and how consistently possible and horribly absolute!'

And then she asked me how far it was from Rio to London; and we went on chatting and pacing, sometimes coming to a stand at the side to watch some sweep of foaming water roaring off from the blow of the lee bow into the weltering gloom until five bells were struck—half-past ten. She then said she felt chilly, and I took her below. It was a little early for bed, however; besides, the excitement of the day still lingered—the signing and witnessing of the queer documents: the captain's insane dream of a treasure-quest, mad, as we deemed it, at all events: the sense of our speeding now towards a port whence we should be able to take ship and proceed comfortably to England.

I went to the cuddy door and called for Wilkins, and on his arrival told him to put a bottle of the wine that had been brought from the wreck on the table along with some biscuit, and, thus furnished, Miss Temple and I managed to kill very nearly another hour. She removed her hat; the lamplight streamed fair upon the marble-like beauty of her face, upon her large, dark, soft, and glowing eyes, upon her rich neglected abundant hair.

'Do you remember that night,' I said, 'in the English Channel, when after the collision with the Frenchman you came to where I stood and asked me to explain what had happened?'

'I would rather not remember anything that passed between us on board the Indiaman, Mr. Dugdale,' she replied with a droop of her long lashes as she spoke.

I gazed at her earnestly; a single glance would have enabled her to witness something of passion in my regard at that instant: I bit my lip to check what my instincts assured me would then

have been said all too soon, and looking at my watch exclaimed: 'Hard upon half-past eleven.'

She rose, and together we descended to our inhospitable steerage quarters.

CHAPTER XXXII

A TRAGEDY

How long it was before I fell asleep I cannot say. The humming of the wake racing away close outside was noisy; the light cargo in the steerage creaked and strained, and the thump of the rudder was frequent, and sometimes startling. I was aroused by a continuous knocking on the bulkhead. It was pitch-dark, despite a small sliding dance of stars in the porthole glass. I thought the knocking was upon my door, and cried out, 'What is it?' It did not cease; and gathering by this time that it proceeded from the bulkhead that divided the cabins, I jumped out of my bunk and beat upon the boards to let Miss Temple know I heard her.

I called; but though I caught her voice, I could not distinguish her utterance. I had turned in partially clothed, and, groping my way to the door, stepped forth and knocked upon her cabin. The handle was touched, and I was sensible that the girl's door was ajar.

'Are you there, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Yes. What is the matter?'

'Did not you hear a pistol-shot?'

'No,' I cried.

'I am certain a firearm has been discharged,' she exclaimed.

'Stay a bit,' said I. 'I will see if anything is wrong, and let you know.'

After some groping, I succeeded in lighting the candle in my lantern; and then, slipping on my shoes, I made for the hatch ladder, which I was able to see by leaving my cabin door open. I entered the cuddy and listened. The lamp had been extinguished; but a sort of spectral illumination of stars and white water came sifting through the skylight and the port-holes and the little windows in the cuddy front, and I was able to determine the outline of objects. All was right in this interior, so far as I could tell. I listened; but not so much as a footfall sounded upon the upper deck, not a note of human voice or movement of men forward. The barque was sweeping through the seas bravely, and the atmosphere of the cuddy was vibratory with the resonant cries of the wind up aloft.

I made for the cuddy door and looked out; nothing stirred on the quarter-deck that ran pallid into the impenetrable shadow past the waist. I returned to the companion steps, which I mounted, and stood in the hatch a moment or two. There was nobody on

the poop saving the man at the helm. I stepped over to him and said, 'Where's the captain?'

'He's gone below,' he answered; 'he told me he wouldn't be long.'

'When did he leave the deck?'

'Seven or eight minutes ago, belike.'

'Did you hear a noise just now that resembled a pistol-shot?' I inquired.

'No, sir,' he answered; 'but who's to hear anything atop of this here shindy of wind and water?'

'That's true,' I exclaimed. 'I doubt if the noise will have meant more than a fall of something below. It is the lady who heard the sound, and I've just stepped up to see what it might mean. It's to be hoped the captain won't linger. This is not a breeze in which to leave a ship in charge of her helmsman only.'

And indeed the little craft wanted too much watching on the part of the fellow to suffer him to talk or to permit of my calling off his attention from his duty. I resolved to wait, that there might be some sort of lookout kept whilst the captain stayed below. The breeze had freshened, I thought, since I left the deck; there was a dim windy look, moreover, all away out to starboard; and the barque close hauled was making the wind to come as hard again as it was blowing, in fact, through her thrusting, plunging, nimble manner of looking up into it. The mainsail is too much for her, thought I; it should be furled. There is a staysail or two too many, also; and that top-gallant-sail will have to come in anon, if the look of the sky out yonder means what it threatens.

Five minutes passed, but the captain did not make his appearance. The sound that Miss Temple had heard was beginning to work an ugly fancy in my mind. I stepped aft to the wheel.

'Did the captain tell you why he was going below?'

'No, sir,' was the answer. 'He'd been standing for about a quarter of an hour stock still; then he comes soddenly in a sort o' run to the binnacle, takes a look at the card, and says: "Keep her as she goes; nothing off: see to it! I shan't be long." That was all.'

At that instant the wind breezed up in a gust that came in a long howl over the weather rail, and the little vessel bowed down to it till the smother alongside looked to be up to the covering-board.

'No use waiting for the captain,' said I, made irritable by anxiety; 'we shall have the masts out of her if we don't mind our eye;' and running forward, I shouted at the top of my voice: 'Lay aft and haul up the mainsail!'

In a moment the watch came tumbling out of the darkness forward. Their manner of rushing gave me to know that they had been standing by for the order to shorten sail, and were wondering why it had not been delivered sooner.

'Furl it, lads,' I shouted, 'when you've hauled it up; but first

get your maintop-gallant staysail hauled down. I must find out what has become of the captain,'

Without losing another moment, I ran into the cuddy and knocked upon the door of the captain's cabin. No answer was returned. I knocked again, thundering with my fist; then tried the handle and found the door locked. 'Good God!' thought I, 'the man has shot himself. *That* will be the meaning of the sound Miss Temple heard.' As I turned for a moment, utterly at a loss how to act, the girl rose through the hatch close to where I stood. She held in her hand the lantern I had left alight in my berth.

'What has happened?' she cried.

'I have no notion as yet,' I responded; 'but I fear the captain has shot himself. Let me take that lantern from you.'

I swiftly hitched it by its laniard to a hook in a stanchion, noticing as I did so that she had completely dressed herself.

'Remain here for the present, will you?' I went on. 'I must go on deck—there is no one to give orders to the men.'

I ran up the steps, and perceived the shadowy shapes of the seamen ascending the shrouds to lay out upon the main yard.

'Who is that there?' I called, observing a dark figure standing near the main hatch.

'Me—Wilkins, sir.'

'Jump forward, Wilkins,' I shouted, 'and call Mr. Lush. Tell him I want him aft—that I'm afraid something serious has happened; in fact, rout up all hands. We shall be having to reef down shortly.'

The fellow sped forwards. It had been no passing gust that had bowed the barque down, but a real increase in the weight of wind; and by this time, knowing fairly well how the gear led, I let go the maintopgallant halliards, and then ran aft to the mizzen topmast staysail halliards, and was dragging with my single pair of hands upon the downhaul, when the carpenter came up to me, followed by the rest of the watch below.

'What's gone wrong?' he said.

'I believe the captain has shot himself. His cabin door is locked, and we have yet to discover that he has committed suicide. The wind freshens, the ship wants watching, and there is nobody to see to her. Will you take charge? I'll wait for you in the cabin.'

What expression a light cast upon his countenance might have shown my news produced in it I know not; there was a pause in him, as of sulky astonishment, but he said nothing. He mounted the poop ladder; and I entered the cuddy, catching the sound as I did so of the men on the main yard chorusing as they triced up the bunt of the sail, along with a sudden roar from the carpenter to clew up the main-topgallant-sail and furl it. The candle end burning in the lantern made but a wretched light, as you will suppose. Close beside it, in such radiance as it emitted, stood

Miss Temple, white as stone, and her eyes wide and luminous with alarm.

'Is the vessel in danger?' she asked.

'Oh dear, no,' I replied; 'the breeze has freshened considerably, and the men are shortening sail. But this light is truly abominable. We shall require to be able to see clearly presently.' And with that I took out the candle and lighted the cabin lamp with it.

'I have been every moment expecting to see that door open, and *his* figure creep out!' said Miss Temple, pointing with a shudder, and without looking, towards the captain's berth. 'Do you believe he has shot himself?'

'Not a doubt of it. Why should his door be locked? I should know he has destroyed himself without being able to make a guess at his method of doing so, but for your saying that you heard the report of a pistol.'

'I assuredly heard it, Mr. Dugdale. I was awake. I have not slept since I lay down. The sound was like the crack of a whip over my head.'

Just then the carpenter roared out some fresh orders. The barque, relieved of her mainsail and topgallant-sail, had recovered from her perilous heel, and was thrashing through it with what seemed a stubborn erectness of spar after the recent wild slope of her masts. The sea was rising, and the vessel was beginning to pitch with some spite in the chopping and smiting shear of her clipper bows, from which the surge recoiled in thunder, washing aft in boiling spume with a sound like the fall of the hail and rain of an electric storm. I could tell without needing to look that Mr. Lush's latest order concerned the reefing of the foretopsail. At all events, he had his little ship well in hand, and the whole of the vessel's small crew were on deck to run about to his directions, and there was some comfort to be got out of knowing this.

To satisfy a small doubt that had arisen, I stepped once again over to the captain's cabin and hammered loud and long upon the door, shouting out his name, and then trying the handle; but to no purpose.

'For what new horrors are we reserved?' cried Miss Temple. 'Shall we ever escape with our lives? How much has been compressed within the last few days: the dead body on the wreck—the drowning of the poor lieutenant—the loss, perhaps, of Mr. Colledge and the sailors in the man-of-war's boat—and now this!' she cried, bringing her hands to her face with a sudden convulsive, tearless sob; then looking at me she said: 'If Captain Braine has killed himself, what is to follow?'

'Rio,' I answered. 'I shall carry the ship there straight. Thank God for such knowledge of navigation as I possess! I trust the captain may not have killed himself; but if he has done so, it will make for our good. He was a madman, and it was impossible from hour to hour to be sure of his intentions.'

'But, Mr. Dugdale, there will be no head to the ship if the

captain be dead. Who, then, is to control the crew—this crew of convicts and mutineers and—and——'

'It was a madman who drew that picture,' said I. 'I suspect he is as correct in his description of his crew as in his description of his treasure. The men are without a navigator; they can do nothing without me. If they are true Jacks, they are already sick of the voyage, and will be glad to have a port under their lee, with the promise of a jaunt ashore and fresh articles to sign on another ship's capstan.'

We continued talking thus; presently I heard the seamen chorusing at the foretopsail halliards, and later on the carpenter Lush entered the cabin by the cuddy door.

'She'll be snug at this,' he exclaimed in his gruff voice; 'there's no more weight of wind, and the whole main-topsail won't be too much for her if it don't freshen yet. What's this about the capt'n, sir?'

As he spoke, I observed the glimmering faces of the crew, the whole body of them, saving the fellow at the wheel, crowding to take a peep through the cuddy windows and doorway. I saw Miss Temple glance with terror towards them; but there was nothing more natural than that the fellows should desire to obtain all news of an event that concerned them so closely as the suicide of their captain. I repeated what little I knew to the carpenter, who at once stalked to the captain's door and tried the handle for himself, shaking it viciously.

'I suppose it'll have to be broke open?' he exclaimed, looking round.

'Certainly,' I answered, 'and the sooner the better. This suspense is intolerable.'

'I'll go forrards and get some tools,' he said.

He returned after a few minutes, and two seamen accompanied him, one of them being Joe Wetherly. The others, heedless of all custom, in their devouring curiosity came shouldering one another into the cuddy, thrusting inch by inch to the centre of it, where they stood staring—a wild and rugged group, indeed, in that light; hairy breasts, naked, weather-darkened nervous arms liberally scored with blue devices, bare feet, gleaming eyes, sheath-knives on their hips—I could scarcely wonder that Miss Temple shrank from them, and clung to my side with her hand in my arm! They did not need the character the captain had given them to make her do that!

Lush forced the door of the berth; it flew open to a heavy blow, and I advanced to take a view of the interior, Miss Temple letting go of my arm with an exclamation, rather choosing to remain alone near the sailors than take a peep at the horror her imagination bodied forth. A small bracket lamp was burning brightly. In the centre of the deck of the cabin lay the body of Captain Braine. He was on his breast, his arms were outstretched, one leg was crooked, as though broken under the other. A pistol of a pattern somewhat

similar to the one I had discovered in Mr. Chicken's locker lay beside his right hand. These details we immediately witnessed; but we had to look a little before we could distinguish the great stain of blood upon the square of drugget under the cheek of the poor creature, and showing in a black line from a hole on a level with his eye.

'He has shot himself, as you said,' exclaimed the carpenter in a hoarse note, and backing half a pace to the right.

'Turn him over, Bill,' said Wetherly to the other sailor.

'Not me! Handle him yourself, Joe.'

Wetherly fell upon a knee, and got the corpse on its back. After my experience with the body on the wreck, I should have deemed myself equal to any sort of ghastly sight-seeing; but that dead captain's face was more than I could bear, and I was forced to look away and to keep my gaze averted, to rally my nerves from the shock the spectacle had given them.

The crew had come shoving right to the very cabin door, and stood in a crowd, staring open-mouthed with a sort of groaning of exclamations breaking out from amongst them.

'A bad job this, sir,' said Wetherly, looking round to me.

'He'll be stone-dead, I suppose?' said the carpenter.

'O God, yes!' I exclaimed.

The carpenter seemed to wait, as if he expected me to give directions.

'Better get the body into the bunk, Mr. Lush,' said I, 'and cover it up for to-night.'

'Aye, hide it as soon as ye will, Joe,' exclaimed the carpenter; and as he said these words, I observed that he rolled his eyes with an expression in them of keen and thirsty scrutiny over the cabin.

Wetherly and the other man who had entered with him lifted the body, placed it in the bunk, and threw a blanket over it. We then quitted the cabin, leaving the lamp burning, though, I fancy, nobody noticed that but myself; and the carpenter put a little wedge of wood under the door to keep it shut. The sailors slowly walked away out on to the quarter-deck, casting inquisitive glances around them, and at Miss Temple, as they withdrew. The carpenter came to a stand at the table, and, turning his surly face upon me, exclaimed in his deep-sea, bad-tempered voice: 'What's to be done now?'

'There's nothing for it,' I answered, 'but to make for the nearest port, and Rio will be that.'

'Ay; but that ain't the question just at present,' he exclaimed. 'What I mean is, what's the discipline agoing to be?'

'Why, of course,' I exclaimed, 'I must render all the assistance I possibly can. If the crew consent, I shall be happy to keep watch and watch with you. In any case, I'll navigate the ship. Very fortunately, I can do so.'

'It'll be a matter for the crew,' said he, talking with his eyes upon the deck and speaking after a pause. 'To-morrow morning

will be time enough to settle what's to be done. I kep' a lookout from eight to twelve to-night; and if you'll stand this here middle watch, I'll be a relieving of ye at four; and arter breakfast, giving you time to get some sleep, I'll call the crew aft, and we'll see what they've got to say, now there ain't neither mate nor capt'n left.'

'But you are the mate; the acting second mate,' I cried, sensible of an indefinable misgiving that grew rapidly into an emotion of cold and heart-sickening consternation.

'I tell ye *no*, sir!' he shouted; 'I'm no second mate. I signed on as ship's carpenter, and I've told ye so. Since Mr. Chicken died, I've been treated by that man there'—he pointed with a square forefinger to the cabin door—'worse than any mongrel dog that e'er a blunderbuss was brought to bear on. *Me* a second mate?' He struck his breast in a sort of frenzy with his clenched fist and grinned in my face.

'Very well,' said I, forcing a note of composure into my voice; 'it is a mere detail of routine, which we can settle to-morrow, as you say.'

'All right,' he exclaimed; and pulling his skin cap down over his head, he trudged on his rounded legs out of the cuddy.

'I must go on deck, Miss Temple,' said I.

She was eyeing me, as though bereft of speech when I addressed her.

'I will accompany you,' she exclaimed.

'No! It is out of the question.'

'Why?' she cried imperiously, with the irritability of dismay and dread in her manner.

'I shall be on deck till four. Such a spell of exposure it will be needless for you to undergo. You are perfectly safe in your cabin.'

'How *dare* you ask me to return to that horrible lonely part of the ship?' she cried, with wrath and alarm brilliant in her eyes.

'Then take some rest upon that locker there.'

'You ask me to remain here *alone* with the dead body close to in that cabin?'

'Miss Temple,' said I firmly, 'if you decline to return to your cabin, you will at least oblige me by staying in this cuddy. I have no time to reason with you. You must obey me, if you please. Give me your hand.' She extended it, and I conducted her to the sofa locker, on which I gently but resolutely compelled her to seat herself. 'You can rest here with perfect safety,' I went on. 'I am astonished that a woman of your spirit should find anything to render you uneasy, in the face of the real difficulties which confront us, in the neighbourhood of a harmless corpse. I can command a view of you and of this interior through that skylight. But you must not come on deck.'

She watched me in a motionless posture with an air of haughty resentment upon her lips, to which a kind of awe in her gaze gave the lie. I left her, and had my foot upon the companion steps,

when a thought occurred to me. Going to the door of the captain's berth, I withdrew the wedge, and entered and picked up the pistol that lay upon the deck. It was a heavy single-barrelled concern, but a firearm all the same, and I thrust it into my breast. I perceived no materials for loading it; but I had what was necessary in that way below; and now I was possessed, as I did not doubt, of the only two pistols in the ship.

I extinguished the lamp, wedged the door afresh, and responding to Miss Temple's appealing stare with a smile, I went on deck. The night was a clear dusk, with a great plenty of shining stars, over which many small clouds were driving swiftly; and the wind still continued to blow strong, though it had not gained in force since sail had last been shortened, and the sea was now running steadily on the bow in regular heaps of dark waters melting at their heads, so that the motion of the barque, by being rhythmic, was comparatively easy. I gained the weather deck; and after a peep at the compass and a glance at the indistinguishable face of the figure at the wheel, I started off on the traditionary pendulum walk of the sea-watch, to and fro, to and fro, from the wheel to the break of the poop, constantly directing looks to windward or up aloft, and frequently at Miss Temple, as she showed, seated as I had left her, visible to me through the glass of the skylight. It was out of the question that she should pace the deck with me throughout that long watch. The pouring wind came with an edge of cold damp that made itself felt after a brief term of exposure to it. Then, again, it was not to be thought of that the sailors should find the lady on deck throughout this night watch, as though we were both in mortal fear, and kept together to hearten each other. Now that it had come to there being no head to the ship, it was of vital importance that Miss Temple should remain as private as possible, but little seen by the men. I had clear ideas as to the extraordinary situation in which we were placed; and as I glanced at her through the skylight window, I made up my mind to subdue her to my views, to conquer the insolence of her spirit, even should it come to my having to act in a manner that might be deemed brutal, never to humour her by giving her reasons, but to peremptorily insist in such a fashion as to make her perceive that, whilst we were thus together, I was her master, and she must instantly acquiesce in my decisions; for unless this was to be managed, her temper, her want of tact, her pettish character as that of a person whose nature had been injured by admiration and indulgence, might end in the destruction of us both.

What a midnight watch was that! I was sick at heart, and miserable with misgiving. My distrust of the carpenter, a feeling that had all along possessed me, was strong even to a conviction that he was equal to the acting of a hellish part, and that being free, and at the head, so to speak, of a gang of men, of whom one only —I mean Wetherly—seemed worthy of confidence, he might be presently hatching some plot of deadly menace to Miss Temple.

and me. I asked myself what form could such a plot take? I knew not: I could but forebode: I could only keep before me the circumstance of a little ship afloat on a wide sea without captain or mates, full to the hatches with commodities of value, a handsome fabric of herself, virtually in the possession of an irresponsible body of men, into whose keeping she had come through the merest effect of fortune without the least stroke of rascality on their part. I say I had only to consider this, and then to think of the character of the crew as it had been represented to me by Captain Braine, to forebode some action on their part that might extinguish my project of reaching Rio—with so much to follow that I durst not give my mind to speculating upon it.

Shocking as had been the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the captain's suicide, the thing sat lightly as a horror upon my imagination, so profoundly agitated was I by the indeterminable fears that had been raised in me by the few words the carpenter had let fall. I could not be sure; but it seemed to me, by the haze of light which hung about the forecastle hatch, called the forescuttle, and by an occasional stirring of shadows amidst it, as though to the movements of the men below, or to figures coming on deck and descending again, that all hands were awake forward. There should have been nothing to particularly disturb me in this suspicion, for enough lay in the captain's death to account for the men keeping awake and talking; still, the belief that the sailors were conversing in their gloomy little sea parlour, with Lush's growling tongue sulkily active amongst them, greatly increased my uneasiness.

I continued to pace the deck, keeping a close eye upon the ship, with watchful regard also of the compass, for every hour of this sailing was bringing us by so many miles nearer to the South American seaboard. Shortly before two o'clock, on looking through the skylight, I observed Miss Temple lying back upon the cushion of the locker in a sound sleep. Her hat was upon her knees, her cheek was pillowed upon her arm; thus she rested in sideways posture. Whilst I stood looking at her, as at a picture of a beautiful sleeping woman framed in the square of the skylight, and touched with the soft illumination of the oil-lamp swinging hard by her couch, a man struck four bells on the forecastle, and a minute or two later the dark figure of a seaman came along to leeward to relieve the wheel. I waited a little, and then stepped to the binnacle under pretence of inspecting the card.

'Are the watch below up forward?' said I

'All hands are awake,' he answered, and I recognised him by his voice, though I could not discern his features. He was a young sailor named Forrest, a fellow I had often taken notice of for the elastic suppleness of his body, the peculiar swing of his walk, an amazing agility aloft, and an air of mutinous impudence in his manner of going about any job he might be put to.

'I suppose they have been talking about the captain's death?' said I.

'They've being talking of a many things,' he responded with a sort of chuckle in his voice, as though he had been drinking.

'Is Mr. Lush among them?'

'Oh, ay.'

'Well, keep your luff,' said I; 'she's a couple of points off her course as it is.'

'Her course for where?' said the man.

'For Rio,' I answered.

He made no answer, and I resumed my pacing of the planks.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CARPENTER CALLS A COUNCIL

At four o'clock the carpenter came aft to relieve me. He asked me in a short off-hand way how the weather had been; and the wide-awake note in his voice satisfied me that, whether or not he had slept during his watch below, he had certainly not now come fresh from his bunk or hammock. When I had answered him, he went abruptly to the compass, and I descended the poop ladder and entered the cuddy.

Miss Temple was still asleep. It was more like some issue of the sorcery of the imagination than the reality to come out of the windy dusk of the night and an association, momentary it might be, with the carpenter, to the spectacle of the slumbering beautiful girl breathing deep and restfully, with the gleam of her white teeth showing through her parted lips, and the lashes of her closed lids resting in a shadow of surprising loveliness upon her colourless cheeks. But rest was imperative to me; there was not another locker to use; and I would not leave the girl alone. I lightly touched her hand; she smiled, but slept on; I touched her again, and she sprang erect with an affrighted air, staring at me with the meaningless gaze of the newly awakened.

'Ah!' she cried with a violent shudder, 'I thought it was the dead captain who touched me! How cold your hand is!'

'I am going to my berth to seek some rest,' said I; 'and would not leave you alone here.'

'Oh no!' she exclaimed; 'I will go with you.'

'You have been sleeping for above two hours,' said I. 'I am very glad. Slumber is strength; nay, it is life. You have been safe, and you will now tell me that I was in the right in entreating you to remain here.'

'In *commanding* me, you mean,' she answered with a faint smile. 'But how miserable I was alone until I fell asleep—constantly imagining that that door was being cautiously opened'—another strong shudder swept through her while she motioned towards the captain's cabin, holding her face averted.

I unhooked the lantern belonging to my berth, lighted the candle in it, and, taking her by the hand, conducted her to the hatch. When we had entered the steerage, I lifted her hand to my lips in the old-fashioned salute and said: 'Miss Temple, if I appear to *command*, it is with the hope of being useful as a protector to a companion whose claims upon me must needs deepen as we continue together and as the outlook darkens.'

I held open her cabin door for her, gave her my lantern; and then going to my own berth, groped my way to the bunk, and was speedily in a sound sleep.

It was eight o'clock by my watch when I awoke. I at once sprang out of bed, and, having carefully secreted the pistol I had brought with me from the captain's cabin, I hastily sluiced my face with some salt water, and stepped to Miss Temple's cabin door, on which I knocked. She answered me. I told her that she would find me on deck. 'It is eight o'clock,' I said, 'and my turn to keep watch has come round.' With that I ascended the steps. Wilkins was in the cuddy, as I must needs call the little living-room, though, after the Indiaman's saloon, it seemed a big name to give to so small an interior. I said: 'The lady will be here shortly. Get breakfast ready for us, d'ye hear? We will eat it on deck, unless there is somebody to keep my lookout whilst I come below for the meal.' He answered, civilly enough, that he would carry it on deck to us on my letting him know when we were ready for it.

I found the carpenter on the poop talking to a couple of seamen; but on seeing me, the two fellows went forward in a sort of sheepish way. It was a fine morning, lively with flying sunshine, and the seas were running in foaming dark-blue hills, which shouldered the reflection of the sun into incessant flashings of fire as dazzling as the beams darted down by the luminary himself betwixt the edges of the streaming clouds. I sent a swift look round; there was nothing in sight. The barque was under the same canvas I had left upon her when I went below; but my first step carrying me to the compass, I perceived that she was making a more southerly course by two points than she had been heading when I left the deck; and, indeed, when I directed my eyes aloft for a second time, I perceived that the yards had been slightly braced in, and that, in short, Mr. Lush was making a fair wind of what was a foul one for Rio. I was greatly startled, but controlled my face, for the man's eyes were upon me.

'I presume, Mr. Lush,' said I, crossing over to him and feigning a certain carelessness of behaviour whilst I looked with a manner of indifference past him at the weather horizon, 'that you are aware the barque is needlessly off her course, seeing that she'll easily look up another two or two and a half points?'

'A ship's course depends upon where she's agoing,' he answered, running his eyes over my figure; 'and nothen's settled yet so far as we're consarned.'

'Oho! Is it so, indeed!' said I, after venting myself in a short whistle. 'What is the objection to Rio, Mr. Lush?'

'I'll be calling the crew aft presently,' he exclaimed; 'it's a question for all hands, not for me nor you only, sir.'

'I trust,' said I, my feigned air of carelessness vanishing before the real consternation that was now active in me, 'that the sailors will not obstruct my earnest desire for the lady's sake, as well as my own, to make for Rio as promptly as possible. Miss Temple and I have met with some cruel experiences, and we are as badly off even now, aboard this smart little barque, as we were in the wreck from which you rescued us. In God's name, Mr. Lush, let there be no unreasonable hindrance to our speedy arrival at a port whence we may take shipping for home.'

'I have said,' he responded in his sulkiest manner, 'that it ain't a question for one man nor for two men, but for all hands.'

I witnessed stubbornness that was to be easily developed into insolence strong in the ruffian's face, and bit my lip to silence my tongue. After a short pause I said: 'I observe that the decks have not been washed down.'

'No; that's right. They han't been washed down.'

'When is the body of the captain to be buried?'

'He is buried,' he answered; and then went on, as though perceiving that some explanation was necessary: 'No good in keeping a human corpse aboard ship. 'Tain't lucky. 'Tain't lucky, even if so be as it's the human corpse of a good man; but when it comes to the body of the likes of *him*——' He spat over the rail. 'He was rolled up in canvas and dropped overboard two hours since.'

'A dog's funeral!' said I, betwixt my teeth.

'A dog's funeral's all that the best sailor must expect; the treatment of a dog when he's alive, and a mongrel's burial when he's dead.'

'Well, I'm here to relieve you,' said I. 'Wilkins will bring my breakfast on deck.'

'All right,' he answered. 'Suppose we call it nine o'clock for the council that's to be held?'

I turned from him, assenting with a gesture, and walked aft, miserably sick at heart, to receive Miss Temple, who at that moment appeared in the companion way. She instantly perceived by my face that there was something gravely wrong with us, and fixed a look of nervous passionate inquiry upon me. There was no purpose to be served by concealing my fears from her—fears which, shapeless as they might now be, were, I did not question, to be converted presently into bitter convictions. I took her hand and conducted her to the skylight, where we were out of earshot of the helmsman.

'I am afraid,' said I, 'that the death of Captain Braine has thickened the problem of this adventure for us.'

'What has happened?' she demanded.

'When I went below at four o'clock this morning,' I replied, 'the *Lady Blanche* was looking up for the port of Rio as closely as the wind permitted her. Since then, Mr. Lush has taken it upon himself to alter the vessel's course, and we need but another point or two of southing to be sailing straight away down the South Atlantic Ocean.'

'But the ship is *now* being steered for Rio?'

'No.'

'No!' she cried. 'Why do you not order the man to direct her according to your wishes?' And she sent one of her flashing glances at the hairy face of the sailor who grasped the spokes.

'The crew are coming aft presently to settle the question of our destination. I can do nothing. If they have made up their minds to a course, they are not going to suffer me to get in the road of it.'

'But what course? What resolution are they likely to form?' she exclaimed, clasping her hands with a gesture of despair, and gazing forwards with an expression of terror at a group of fellows who stood at the galley door talking.

'I know nothing, and can tell you nothing,' I replied. 'It is to signify another tax upon our patience, and we must wait. Some destination they are bound to hit upon; it will not be Rio, I believe. We shall see. They cannot do without me—that is, I alone am capable of navigating the vessel—and in that may lie our security. But one thing you must help me to achieve, Miss Temple: I mean a behaviour of coolness, good temper, and tact. I believe the devil himself is lodged in the hide of that round-backed brute of a carpenter, and the crew may not be wanting in some of the highest flavoured of his agreeable qualities. Help me, then, to the most inoffensive and patient of attitudes, and say nothing yourself—nay, *look* nothing! for those dark eyes of yours have a hot eloquence of their own, and a man need not hear your rich voice to know what is passing in your mind.'

She forced a calmness upon herself, and spoke in a low voice: 'If the crew insist upon sailing the ship to some distant part, is there nothing that we can do to induce them to transfer us to another vessel, or to run into the land close enough to set us ashore in any town on the coast?'

'First, let them come to a resolution.'

'This is a shocking situation to be in! Your old energy seems to be leaving you. You give me dreadful news in a lifeless way, and talk spiritlessly of suffering the crew to do as they please.' She said this, still preserving her forced composure; but there was ire in her gaze and temper and despair in her respiration, in the twitching of the nostril, in the curl of her lip, when she had spoken.

I looked at her steadily, but in silence, weighing down upon her gaze, as it were, with my own until her eyes fell. 'Not spiritless yet,' said I. 'Nor shall I suffer you to make me so, Miss Temple.'

She hung her head, and beat with her fingers upon her knuckles,

as though she needed some exercise of that sort to enable her to suppress her emotions or her tears. Wilkins came under the skylight to ask if I was ready for breakfast. I bade him bring it to us; and he arrived with some coffee and cold meat and biscuit. I could not induce the girl to eat. Even when she took a sip of coffee she scarcely seemed able to swallow it. Her misery was wretched to see. Sometimes she would start and send a wild sweeping look round the horizon; often she would moan. I tried to put some heart into her; but I could find little to say, ignorant as I then was of what the crew meant to do. Most of them seemed to be in or about the galley. A few stood in the doorway, and their behaviour suggested that there were others inside, to whose utterance, whatever form it took, they listened with attention, sometimes glancing aft at us. Shortly before nine o'clock I said to Miss Temple that the crew were coming aft at that hour, and requested her to go to her own cabin that she might be out of sight of them.

'Cannot I remain on deck?' she exclaimed. 'My suspense will be a torment. You are banishing me to an underground cell.'

'You will withdraw to your cabin, if you please, Miss Temple. We are here dealing with a crew of men who are now without a head, and whose temper may grow lawless whenever they shall realise that they are their own masters.'

'You will come to me the moment you are at liberty, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Most assuredly.'

I accompanied her to the companion, and watched her as she descended the steps. She halted at the bottom of the ladder to look up at me with eyes of appealing grief. How close she had come to my heart I might not have been able to successfully guess till that moment. I longed to take her in my arms, to entreat her forgiveness for any act or speech of sternness or harshness, to soothe her with all bright and comforting hopes that it was in my power to utter. A step carried her out of my sight, but for some minutes after, the memory of her beautiful appealing eyes dominated all other thoughts, and I could think of nothing but her noble figure, the grief of her colourless, high-bred face, the suggestion I found in her attitude of her yearning for my presence and protection—profoundly touching to me who loved her, spite of my knowing that the motive of her longing was to be found in no other sentiment than that of her fear.

Presently the carpenter came out of the galley knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and advanced slowly to the poop, followed by most of the crew, who halted opposite the cuddy front.

'The cabin'll be the place to talk in,' said he; 'there'll be no hearing of one another up here. There's Joe Wetherly'll keep a lookout whilst you and me are below.'

'I am ready,' I answered.

He called to Wetherly, who was standing in the waist, forward of the others. The man touched his cap to me as he ascended the

poop ladder, and looked at me meaningly through the minute holes in which his eyes lay deep buried. I entered the cuddy with the carpenter, who turned round as he passed through the door to sing out, 'Step in, lads.' Nine fellows in all followed. Most of them carried a sort of grinning, wondering expression on their faces; but here and there I took note of a determined countenance.

'Mr. Lush,' I exclaimed, 'the ordering of this business is in your hands. I will leave you to settle whatever ceremonies we are to pass through.'

'Mr. Lush'll take the cheer,' said one of the men.

The carpenter at once seated himself in the captain's chair at the after end of the little table. The sailors sat down upon the benches. Lush exclaimed: 'Mr. Dugdale, you sit alongside o' me here. Mates, ease yourselves down, and make room for the gent.'

I took the place he indicated, and waited with as resolved a face as I could screw my features into for what was to follow. There was a pause whilst the carpenter, rolling his eyes over the seamen, seemed to be hunting in his mind for words in which to express himself. The men stared from him to me with an occasional glance round, especially in the direction of the tumbler rack, at which they would cast thirsty looks. In this brief spell of silence I sought to interpret their intentions from their postures; but there was little to reassure me in their bearing. There was a kind of defiance in it that instantly made itself felt. They were clad for the most part in shirts and duck or dungaree breeches; their breasts were bare, with the sight here and there of some ink and gunpowder device straggling amidst the hair; they leaned upon their naked muscular arms or sat with them folded looking at me or the carpenter. There was no hint of such diffidence as one might expect to find in forecastle hands occupying the saloon or cabin of a ship.

'We've been a-tarning over,' began the carpenter, speaking slowly and viewing me out of the corners of his eyes, 'the condition we're put in by the sooicide of Capt'n Braine. All hands is agreed, saving one, who says that he dorn't much care how it goes.'

'Who is that one?' I asked.

'Joe Wetherly,' he answered.

I waited, but he seemed to require me to question him.

'You are all agreed, you say, Mr. Lush—upon what?'

He coughed, thrust his fingers into his neckcloth to ease his throat, and then said: 'Well, now, I'll tell ye exactly how it stands. Wilkins, there, was next door to the capt'n's cabin when he told you of that matter of two hundred thousand pound lying stowed away in a South Sea island. He comes forward and tells us all about it.' He paused, then said with a tone of impatience: 'Of course ye can guess now what we've settled on?'

'Pray, explain,' said I, understanding but too thoroughly, and feeling the blood forsaking my cheek.

'Why,' said the carpenter with a short laugh, 'what we've resolved on is to sail to that there island and get the money.'

'No good in leaving all that money to lie there for the savages to dig up,' exclaimed one of the men.

'Mr. Lush,' said I, 'I am a stranger in this ship, and have but one desire, and that is, to leave her along with the young lady who was my fellow-passenger aboard the Indiaman. You will of course do what you will with the vessel. The action of the crew can make no part of my business. All that I ask is that you will signal the first vessel we fall in with, let her be heading as she will, and tranship us.'

A growling 'No!' ran amongst the men. The carpenter echoed it with a blow of his fist upon the table. 'No, sir! we can't spare you. It'll be *you*, Mr. Dugdale, that'll carry us to that island.'

My consternation was too visible to be missed even by the ignorant eyes which were bent upon me.

'You'll be treated fairly, sir,' said one of the men, with an air and tone of conciliation. 'We've allowed for you being a gent as'll be carried away from the parts he wants to git to. Mr. Lush and us men have talked it well over, and the share of the money ye choose to name is the share you shall have for the time and trouble this bit of navigation'll cost you.'

A murmur of assent followed this speech, several heads nodding so vehemently that their hair danced about their eyes.

'But, men,' I cried, turning upon and addressing them in a body, 'you are surely not going to persuade me that you *believe* in this yarn of the captain?'

'Don't you?' inquired the carpenter with a sarcastic sneer.

'It was the imagination of a madman,' I continued—'a crazy fancy, men! Surely there is no sailor here but knew that the captain was insane. Did not his actions, his talk, his very looks, prove him mad? And what more convincing proof of his insanity could you desire than the last act of his life?'

Two or three of the fellows grumbled out something, but I did not catch the words. 'Mad, was he?' exclaimed the carpenter in a voice of coarse, morose sarcasm; 'ye didn't think that when you stood out for a share.'

'How do you know,' I cried, 'that I stood out for a share?'

'By God, then,' he roared, 'we know everything! Did ye or did ye not sign an agreement for a share?'

'I did,' I answered, 'but merely to humour the man's madness. I should have left the ship at Rio.'

'There's no use in talking,' he exclaimed, smoothing down his voice a trifle; 'the compact between ye was overheard. Me and the others here was to be got rid of at Rio. Then a crew of Kanakas was to be shipped off the Sandwich Islands. Then, with the gold aboard hidden out of sight, you and him was to ship fresh hands. Mad?' he cried in an indescribably sneering

way; 'no, no, that worn't do. Ye didn't think him mad, then, when you made him provide that if the law laid hold of him for a-running away with his ship, you was to be guaranteed free o' peril by what you or him tarmed a hinstrument. Ye didn't think him mad then, and ye don't think him mad now.'

'Wilkins,' I exclaimed to the young fellow who sat at the corner end of the table, 'you overheard that conversation, and your ears were sharp enough to gather in every syllable of it. Were they not sharp enough, my lad, to judge by the tone of my voice that I assented to the madman's humour merely to induce him to make for the near port of Rio, that I and the lady might quickly get away from this vessel?'

The veal-faced fellow stirred uneasily to the many eyes which were turned upon him; but he answered, nevertheless, with resolution and emphasis: 'You stipulated for tarms, specially for a share, and you spoke as if you was in airnest.'

'Mr. Lush,' I cried, 'I am a gentleman. Believe me, on my honour as one, when I swear to you that I accepted the captain's story as a madman's fabrication, and seemed to agree with him only that I might get away from his ship the sooner.'

'What was the dawcument you signed, sir?' inquired one of the sailors.

'Ah, that's it,' cried another; 'let's see the hinstrument, as Mr. Lush tarms it.'

I had them both in my pocket-book, intending to preserve them as curiosities and as illustrations of my adventure with Miss Temple. I could not refuse to produce them, nor would I stoop to a falsehood; but I was sensible as I drew out the pocket-book, intently watched by the seamen, that the mere circumstance of my carrying the papers about with me as though I deemed them too precious to be laid aside in a drawer, told heavily against the assurance I had made to the men. The carpenter picked the documents up.

'Who can read here?' said he, looking round. There was no reply. 'Will you recite 'em, sir?' he continued, turning his surly eyes upon me.

'There's Joe as can read,' broke in a voice.

'Ay, call Joe,' exclaimed another man.

This signified that I was not to be trusted. They might suppose I would invent instead of reading, and there was no man present able to spell a word to disprove what I chose to deliver. The lee lid of the skylight lay open. The carpenter roared through it for Joe Wetherly, who promptly stepped below.

'What is it?' he asked, looking round upon his mates.

'Here, Joe,' said the carpenter, 'you're the one scholard aboard us. Tarn to, will 'ee, and let's hear what's wrote down upon these papers.'

The man glanced at me with an expression of sympathy and bashfulness. 'I hope there's nothen private and agin your wish

in this, sir?' he exclaimed. 'I'm for standin' neutral in this here job.'

'Pray read,' said I.

He did so, backing and filling in his postures in true sailor fashion as he struggled through the writing, reciting the words slowly, with considerable pauses between, which furnished his hearers with time to digest what he delivered. He then put the papers down, but with an air of astonishment, as I noticed with grief and anxiety, as if having been before incredulous of the captain's story, he was beginning to regard it as a fact now in the face of such documentary evidence as he had read.

'All right, Joe; thank ye,' said the carpenter gruffly; 'you can go on deck agin.' The man went up the ladder slowly, as though lost in thought. 'Lads,' exclaimed Lush, 'ye'll agree with me there's no need for further arguefication after what ye've just heard.'

'The money's right enough, and we'll git it,' said one of the men.

'Where's the chart of the island as Wilkins said the captain talked about?' inquired the limber, bold-faced young seaman with whom I had spoken at the wheel when I found the barque off her course.

All eyes were at once turned upon me. 'You'll find it in the drawer of the table of the captain's cabin,' said I.

The fellow coolly entered the berth, and presently returned with a handful of papers. 'Which 'll it be, sir?' he exclaimed, placing them before me. I picked up the parchment chart, and gave it to the carpenter, who spread it out before him, and instantly all the men came round to his chair, and stood in a heap of shouldering figures mowing and mopping over his shoulders to catch a view, tossing the hair with jerks of their heads out of their eyes, and breathing hard with excitement.

'I suppose you're capable of explaining the meaning of these here marks?' exclaimed the carpenter, pressing a shovel-shaped thumb upon the outline of the island.

'You shall have the yarn as the captain gave it me,' said I, speaking with a throat dry with mortification and sickness at heart; for it was only too certain now that my agreements with the captain coupled with this chart had hardened the men's conviction into an immovable resolution. They listened with breathless interest as I told them that the barb of the arrow indicated the situation of the buried money; that the treasure lay hidden so many paces away from the wash of the water of the lagoon; that the blot in the centre of the bight was meant to express a coral pillar that served as a mark to obtain the bearings of the gold by; and so on. I see their feverish eyes as I write coming and going from my face to the chart, and the various expressions of exultation, eager determination, amazement, and delight on the mob of countenances over the carpenter's shoulders.

'You now have what the captain explained to me,' said I; 'but

he was a madman, men; and I take God to witness that though this island may be real, the money is the coinage of a diseased mind.'

'Yet ye would not stir till you had made him agree to give you a share,' said the carpenter. 'Boys, back to your places whilst I delivers the resolution we have all of us made up our minds to.'

The sailors hurriedly resumed their seats. The carpenter gazed slowly round, then addressed me with his eyes in the corner of their sockets whilst his face pointed straight down the table.

'We're here without a capt'n,' he began, 'and though this barque ain't ourn, we mean to use her. We don't intend no act of piracy. When we've got the gold, we'll deliver up the ship and her cargo, which we shan't meddle with. We're all of us working-men, and the money in that there island, fairly distributed, 'll make all hands of us independent for life. There's no more inwolved than the job of fetching it, and that's to be easily managed.' The men nodded emphatically. 'You're a navigator, Mr. Dugdale, and we can't do without ye. There's no good in talking of shipping another man in your place, because, d'ye see, that 'ud oblige us either to communicate with a passing vessel or to put into some port, neither of which is to be hentertained, seeing the nature of the secret which is ourn, and which we mean to keep ourn. We're agreeable to con-sider any tarms ye may think proper to propose. As has bin said, the share ye name is the share ye'll have. Ye shall be capt'n, and treated as capt'n. You and the lady shall live in this here part of the ship without mollystation, as the saying is; and ye'll find us a perlite and willing crew, who'll stick to our side of the compact as *you* stick to yourn. The money ye'll get by this job, gent as ye are, will repay both you and the lady for loss o' time and for work done. This here barque knows how to sail, and neither me nor you'll spare her; for we're now in a hurry, and this voyage can't end too quickly to please us all. Them's our tarms, which ye can put into writing if you please, and we'll write our marks agin it. There must be no communicating with ships; and *ye've got to be honest!*' He said this with a sudden frown, looking full at me. 'Is that your mind, men?'

There was a hurricane response of 'Ay, ay! That's right; that's right.'

'Give me a little while to consider,' said I, observing that the carpenter had come to an end.

'By when will we have your answer?' he demanded.

'By noon.'

'Agreed,' he exclaimed. 'Here's your two documents. I'll take charge of this here chart.'

A few minutes later I was alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I ASSENT

I SAT as the sailors had left me at that table, lost in thought, bending all the energies of my mind to full realisation of my situation, that my judgment might soundly advise me. I dare say I remained thus for above twenty minutes, as motionless as ever was the dead figure that we had met with in the deck-house of the wreck. Then slowly rising, I went to one of the cabin windows and stood mechanically staring at the piebald sky that would come with a sweep, as the vessel rolled to windward, to the throbbing line of the frothing horizon; and thus I continued, still thinking, weighing one consideration and then another, forming resolutions which the next effort of thought rendered helplessly idle, until I had arrived at a determination; when, starting from my deep and painful reverie, I descended into the steerage and knocked on Miss Temple's cabin door. She immediately opened it.

'At last!' she cried. 'Oh, Mr. Dugdale, what have you to tell me now?'

'Let us go to the cabin,' I answered; 'we shall be alone there. The gloom of these quarters is horribly depressing.'

My manner caused her to regard me for a moment or two with a feverish eagerness of scrutiny; she then mounted the steps, and I followed her.

'I wish I had news to give that might comfort you,' said I, seating myself at her side. 'The men left me half an hour ago. I have been thinking my hardest since, and will tell you now how matters stand, and how I believe I must act.'

She breathed quickly, but said nothing. Her eyes devoured me, so passionate was her curiosity and fear.

'The captain's conversation with me,' I began, 'was, as you know, overheard by the rogue Wilkins, who waits upon us. He must have hearkened thirstily; not a syllable did he lose, and every sentence he carried forward to the crew. They are fully convinced of the truth of the crazy story; they are firmly persuaded that there are some two hundred thousand pounds' worth of golden coin buried in that South Sea island; they were also made aware by that scoundrel listener that I had insisted upon having an agreement, signed and witnessed; which of course confirmed them in their opinion that I myself believe in the captain's story up to the hilt. Their demand, then, is, that I should navigate the ship to the island, that they may dig up the money hidden in it.'

She listened with silent horror.

'They laugh at my assurance that the captain was mad,' I went on, 'and they see nothing in his suicide to cause them to doubt that his story is absolutely true.'

'And what did you tell them?'

'That I must have time to think, and will give them an answer by noon

'What *do* you think?' she demanded, searching my gaze with her proud eyes.

'I see nothing for it but to undertake to sail the ship to the South Pacific.'

'Are you mad?' she almost shrieked. 'To the South Pacific! Did you not say to them that you will insist upon their stopping the first ship that passes, and putting you and me on board of her?'

'They are not to be reasoned with,' I answered gently; 'the dream of this gold has raised an appetite in them that might easily convert them into wild beasts, if I refuse to help them to satisfy their hunger. They will not suffer communication with any passing vessel; they will not permit me to make for any port. Their proposal is that I shall be captain, and have, with you, the exclusive use of this end of the ship, and they promise me handsome usage. But underlying the terms they desire me to agree to is a menace that I should be blind not to see. I must do what they want, or what that villain Lush has contrived that they shall want, or God alone knows what the issue may be for you as well as for myself.'

She sat viewing me like one paralysed.

'My intention,' I went on, 'is to inform the carpenter at noon that I assent to the wishes of the crew.'

She was about to speak; I held up my hand.

'I entreat you to let me have my way. Do not reason. You can offer no remedy for this situation saving that of haughty demand, which, unless you can back it, as a theory of escape, by a gang of men capable of pistolling the fellows forward, will be of no more use to you or to me than a feather to a drowning man. My resolution is to consent to navigate this vessel to that South Sea island. The island may be an imaginary one; the crew's disappointment may force us into a hunt; they will then certainly believe that the captain's story was the fancy of a madman, and will ask me to carry them to some near port This will be the issue of the adventure, supposing it is all smooth sailing till then. But what may happen meanwhile? A storm to cripple us, and force us to seek assistance? The sea abounds in the unexpected. We must wait upon fortune. Nothing shall tempt me to endeavour to force her hand by any sort of demeanour that is not one of tact, good temper, and secret, iron-hard resolution to snatch at the first chance that may come along. Why, is not such a policy as this your due, Miss Temple? Compared to what *might* happen if I did not deal with these men as a combustible not on any account whatever to be approached with matter that could give fire to them, this existence, this unendurable existence which we are now passing through, might be looked back upon as a veritable paradise. I am one to twelve, and you have no protector but me. Think of it!

Bear with my judgment, then; help me by striving to witness wisdom in my determination; and above all keep up your heart, which is an Englishwoman's, whose pulse should grow stronger as the road grows darker.'

She had put her hands to her face, and so sat listening to me, slightly rocking herself. Presently she looked up.

'I wish I had the spirit you ask me to show,' she said in a low voice. 'You may have resolved rightly—but this long alienation from home—the misery of this existence—the peril we are in, which every day, which every hour, seems to increase—oh, it is hard to bear! I will endeavour to school myself. I will strive to see with your eyes'—she broke off with a sob.

'All will come right,' I exclaimed; 'it is entirely a question of waiting. Have you patience? Yes—and your patience will keep you hopeful. Trust to me and to my judgment.'

I took her hand in both mine and pressed it. She did not offer to withdraw it. Indeed, it seemed as though she found comfort in the clasp; her hard expression of consternation softened, and her fine eyes took the same air of appeal I had noticed in them when she went below to her cabin.

'There is yet the chance,' I said, 'of my being able to persuade the crew to transfer you to a passing ship. I might indeed,' I went on, warming up to the fancy, 'insist upon this as part of my agreement with them.'

She slightly shook her head and her glance fell.

'How long will it take us to reach this island?' she asked, keeping her gaze bent down.

'Ten or twelve weeks perhaps.'

She bit her lip to enable her to speak steadily, and said: 'Supposing there is no gold, what will be done?'

'I cannot tell,' I answered; 'we may be quite certain that there is no gold. It yet remains to be seen whether even the poor wretch's island is real.'

'If there should be no island, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Well, as I just now said, the men will at first suppose me wrong in my navigation, and oblige me to keep on hunting about for a bit. But such a quest will not take long to tire them, and they will probably ask me to carry them on to the coast.'

'To what part?'

'Valparaiso, probably. That will be a near port in those seas.'

'At that rate,' she exclaimed with an expression of impatience and dismay, 'we shall be sailing about for five or six months without the least opportunity of my getting on shore, of my returning home, of my being able to obtain a change of dress.'

'Providing nothing happens. And even assuming that you are forced to see this adventure out to the bitter end, the worst that befalls you is a disagreeably long divorce from your home, together with such discomforts as you should laugh at when you think of

them side by side with the tragedy that this ramble is easily to be worked into.'

However, spite of her little effort to look the difficulty in the face, she seemed stunned. She would start sometimes whilst I talked to her, and send a wild sweeping look round the cabin, as though she could not realise her situation and sought to persuade herself that she was in a dream. I was grieved for her beyond words, yet I would not exhibit too much sympathy either, lest I should unduly accentuate the significance of our condition, and make her suppose that I believed it darker and more perilous than it really was. She had been buoyed up with a hope of escaping into another ship, or of shortly landing at Rio, and sailing home from there; and the disappointment coming on top of the perception that our adventure, harsh and soul-subduing as it had already been in some particulars, was only in reality just beginning, seemed to break her down. I did my utmost to make light of the business: said that but for my anxiety for her I should enter upon the affair with positive relish, accepting it as a wild romance of the sea, which could seldom happen to a man in his life, and which he ought to live through and see out, if only for the sake of the memory of a stirring picturesque passage that at the longest would yet be brief.

'As to wearing-apparel,' I said, 'there are needles and thread forward, and I don't doubt that when you are put to it you will be able to manage. And then, suppose this story of the captain's should prove true! suppose we should actually find buried in the spot he indicated a mass of gold which, when equally divided amongst us, would yield every man several thousands of pounds!'

She searched my face with her glowing eyes. 'You do not believe this?' she cried.

'Certainly I do not,' I answered. 'I am only supposing.'

'I wish I could read your heart; I wish I could be sure that your determination to assent to the men's wishes is not owing to sympathy with their own ideas.'

I burst into a loud laugh. 'Of how many sins do you think me capable?' I exclaimed. 'How many enormous follies am I equal to? I believe you already secretly regard me as a pirate. Oh, Miss Temple, no man could ever feel ill-tempered in conversing with you, say what you will. But you are a little trying, though, now and again. Why do you wish to read my heart? You might discover sentiments which would render me detestable to you.'

'I do not understand you,' she exclaimed, looking somewhat frightened.

'Admiration for you, in a person whom you dislike, would make you abhor him.'

'Mr. Dugdale, is this a time for such feeble small-talk as would scarcely be endurable amidst safety and comfort? I should not be so utterly unhappy as I am if I felt that my mother knew where I was, that she was conscious of all that has happened to me, and that we should meet again.'

'It will all come right,' said I, looking at my watch. 'I must make ready now for taking sights, and letting the carpenter know the determination I have arrived at. Back me, Miss Temple, in my efforts by the utmost exertion of your tact. And now, come on deck with me, will you? There is life in the fresh and frothing scene outside, and you will find courage in the mere sight of the wide horizon, with thoughts of what lies behind it, and how time will work all things to your wishes.'

I entered the captain's cabin to fetch a sextant, and then, with Miss Temple, went on deck. Lush was marching up and down the weather side of the poop. The sailors were sprawling about forward in whatever shadowings of the canvas they could find, most of them smoking, their faces red as powder-flags with the heat. Hot it was, with the sun shining nearly over our mastheads, with a sting like to some fierce bite in every flashing launch of his radiance betwixt the wool-white clouds blowing transversely athwart his path, spite of the strong sweep of the wind as it came splitting in long whistlings upon our rigging from a little forward of the beam, the rush of it feeling almost damp to the flesh to the view of the foaming waters melting into yeast out of the long blue lines of the Atlantic surge. The barque, making a fair breeze of it, was storming through the seas in noble style, shouldering off vast masses of throbbing white from her weather bow with a wake twisting away astern of her of twice her beam in width, a broad path of glittering, leaping, blowing crystals and foam flakes and creaming eddies rising and falling for a mile astern into the windy blue there, full of fire and snow as it looked with the spume of breaking waves and the splendour of the darting sunlight.

The carpenter came to a stand when I arrived. I went up to him at once, Miss Temple at my side.

'I have thought the matter over,' I said, 'and accept the men's terms.'

'Glad to hear it,' he answered, with a slow smile breaking sulkily through his surly countenance. 'If you care about a written undertaking——'

'No,' I interrupted contemptuously; 'my agreement is based on yours. If you do not hold piously to every article of it, I drop my part.'

He viewed me with his head slightly on one side, but without any appearance of resentment at my peremptory tone. Coarse and unlettered as the fellow was, he had discernment enough to witness what he would regard as sincerity of purpose in my very outspokenness.

'All you've got to do,' said he, 'is to carry us to that there island. You do your bit, and you'll have no occasion to grumble at us for not doing ourn. But—you'll *do* it. You onderstand me, Mr. Dugdale? So long as you're honest, you'll find *us* honest.'

The ugly significance he imparted to these words by the look

that accompanied them, I could not hope to express. Miss Temple, whose hand was on my arm, shrank at my side. It pleased me that she should have witnessed that look and heard the words, for they would go further to persuade her that the only road to choose in this matter was the one I had taken, than any amount of reasoning on my part.

'Your threats are perfectly indifferent to me,' I exclaimed, eyeing him coolly and fixedly. 'I believe I know your character, and don't question your capacity to act up again to the part your captain told me you had already played.'

'What was that?' he growled, but with no other change of face than such as temper might produce. I seemed to find even in this little thing that the captain had told me a lie when he charged the fellow with murder, and my mind felt easier on a sudden as to a conviction of the truth of a matter less dark than I had dared believe.

'That is my business,' I responded, preserving my cool, almost contemptuous, manner. 'You need be at no pains to threaten me. You'll achieve nothing by your forecastle menaces. I have been a sailor in my time, and quite know what you and such as you are. If you or any of your mates disappoint me in a single particular of the understanding between us, I will throw this sextant,' said I, flourishing it under his nose, 'overboard, and you may grope your way round the Horn as best you can. That agreement is this' (I elevated my forefinger): 'First, we are to have the exclusive use of this end of the ship; you alone coming aft to stand your watch.' He nodded. I erected another finger. 'Next, the captain's cabin and the one adjoining are to be occupied by this lady and myself.' He nodded again. I raised a third finger, thrusting it close to his face. 'Next, Wilkins continues to wait upon us as heretofore; we are to be fed with care and punctuality; it is distinctly to be understood—and this *you* will see to—that no liquor aboard is broached outside a tot or two per man per day; for,' said I, speaking with the most emphatic deliberateness I could contrive, 'if there should be a single exhibition of drunkenness amongst the crew, I shall pitch this sextant overboard.'

'I've got nothen to say agin that,' he exclaimed, speaking with something of sullen respect, as though impressed by my energy and language.

'Next,' I proceeded, 'I am to be captain, and what I say must be law, and what I do must be done.'

'Saving this,' said he, elevating two square fingers in imitation of my gesture: 'Fust, you ain't going to order us to speak a ship, and next, you ain't going to get us to obey ye, if you should take it into your head to steer for a port.'

'No,' I replied, 'that is a part of my agreement. Yet there is this to be said: it is mere idle cruelty to carry this young lady away round Cape Horn into the Pacific. She is without any other wearing apparel than what you see; she is destitute of almost every

convenience; her mother is in bad health, and she wishes to return as speedily as possible, that no news about us may reach England that is not perfectly true. The crew, therefore, will not object to speak a ship that we may transfer this lady to her.'

'No!' he roared.

'Her going will render me easy in my mind as to her safety,' I continued, 'and I shall be able to serve you the better by knowing that she is on her way home.'

'No!' he roared again; 'she's quite safe aboard us. There must be no speaking with ships. 'Sides,' he added, falling back a step with a round flourish of his arm, 'the lady knows all about the gold, and where it is, and how it's to be come at.'

'I can keep a secret, Mr. Lush,' she exclaimed.

'No,' he repeated with a stamp of his foot; 'sorry for it, lady, but here ye are, and here ye must stop. I know what the crew 'ud say. I'm but expressing of their minds. Here ye stop, lady. Mr. Dugdale, that was a part of the bargain, as we onderstood it this marning. Besides, lady,' he added with an indescribable leer, 'ye wouldn't care to be separated from him *now*, would 'ee?'

She moved so as to bring him between me and her.

'That will do, Mr. Lush,' said I. 'I am acquainted with your wishes, and you know now my resolution;' and, so saying, I walked to a part of the deck where I could command the sun, and went to work with my sextant, talking to Miss Temple in a low voice as I ogled the luminary.

'You see now how it is? If I refused my assent to the crew's wishes, they might have sent me adrift in a boat—alone,' I added significantly.

'He is a most dreadful creature. You spoke to him bravely. But is that manner what you call tact?'

'Yes. The man must not imagine that I am afraid of him. I would that I could choke him with his own threats.'

'I believe he would not shrink from murdering both of us.'

'They have made up their minds to sail to the island, and they mean that I shall carry them there. That resolve was strong in them when they entered the cabin. If I had refused—— But no matter! It may yet come to my being able to induce them to speak a ship.'

She made no response. There was a short silence between us.

'Make eight bells!' I shouted, and the chimes floated sharp upon the rushing wind as I walked aft to the companion, Miss Temple always at my side.

I went straight to the captain's cabin, and there worked out my observation, and fixed the correct position of the barque on the chart. The course she was steering happened to be the true direction she needed to take, and there was nothing to mend in that way. Miss Temple came to the table and watched me as I made my calculations. When I had come to an end, I asked her to remain where she was, and returned with the chart on deck. I beckoned

to the carpenter, who was standing at the break of the poop, as though waiting for me to arrive that he might go forward to his dinner.

'Here's our situation to-day,' I exclaimed, pointing to the chart—it was a tract-chart of the world—'and here's Cape Horn. Our course then is as we're steering.'

He stared at the chart with the blind and stupid look of a man who cannot read, and after a bit said: 'Let's see: here's south, and here's west, ain't it? And here's Cape Horn, as you say. Ay, our course is about right for it, I allow.'

Whilst I rolled the chart up, I exclaimed: 'It is inconvenient to be without a stand-by for a third relief. You and I both want to dine at once, and there is nobody to keep a lookout in the place of one of us. The man who had charge this morning whilst we were below appeared to be a very respectable steady sailor. Suppose, now, calling me captain, and you chief officer, we appoint him, with the sanction of the crew, of course, second mate.'

'I dunno as I should do that,' he answered; 'best not have too many masters aboard. *I'm* no chief officer, and there'll be no convartin' of Joe Wetherly into a second mate. We're all jest *men*. But I tell 'ee what; if the crew's willing, Joe might be selected to relieve you or me whensoever it comes about as the pair of us wants to be below at the same time, as now.'

'Very well,' I exclaimed, in the sort of peremptory yet half-careless way which I had made up my mind to employ when speaking to this man; 'work it out in your own fashion. You can send him aft to relieve me when he's done dinner. I shall feel obliged by your seeing that Wilkins turns to and prepares the table for us at once.'

I was about to leave him, when he exclaimed: 'One question, Mr. Dugdale. Nothen was said between us men and you as to the share ye expect.'

'Never mind about that now,' I answered.

'The agreement betwixt you and the captain was for a third, I think,' said he; 'you won't expect that, now there's a dozen of us in the consarn?'

'Oh no, oh no! Send Joe Wetherly aft as soon as he's done.'

'It's onderstood,' said he, 'that the lady won't take no share.'

'Yes, you may understand that,' I exclaimed. 'As for my portion,' I continued, anxious to get rid of him, 'give me what you think I shall have fairly earned, and you'll satisfy me.'

'Right!' he exclaimed with alacrity, seeking clumsily to conceal an emotion of sulky exultation. 'Just another word, Mr. Dugdale. What sort of character might that ha' been which the captain gave me?'

'Oh, damn it! go and send Joe Wetherly aft,' I cried, feigning a fit of temper; and I marched away to the binnacle, leaving him to trudge forward.

A few minutes later, on looking through the skylight, I perceived

Wilkins preparing the table. Presently, Wetherly arrived on the poop. I went forward to meet him, that I might be out of earshot of the fellow at the wheel, and at once said : 'Wetherly, how is it with you in this truly infernal business?'

'Truly infarnal it is, sir,' he instantly replied ; 'but you've got the most raw-headed lot of men to deal with that ever slung hammocks in a ship's forecastle. After they went forward last night, they fell a-debating, all hands of them, and settled for this ship to fetch away that there gold, you commanding. I was agin it till I see how hot they talked, and then I thinks says I to myself, what do it sinnify? Whether I'm bound away to the Isle o' France or to a loonatic's island in the South Pacific, is all the same. If there's money there, so much the better. If there ain't, it can't be helped. One agin ten's not going to do much aboard a ship ; so, when I was asked for an opinion, I just says, "I'm neutral, lads. Do as ye like. I'll be with ye ; but never none of ye go and ask if I'm *of* ye."'

'You don't surely believe in Captain Braine's crazy fancy?'

'Well, I own, Mr. Dugdale, that that there agreement 'twixt you and him a bit nonplushed me this mornin' after I had read it out. It did look oncommonly like as though you yourself genu-inely believed in the yarn.'

He viewed me critically, though respectfully, as he spoke, with his mere pins'-heads of eyes.

'Oh, man, I agreed—I pretended to fully credit—wholly with the idea of coaxing the madman to Rio, where the lady and myself would have left the barque. Can't you see *that*, Wetherly?'

'Why, yes,' he answered quickly, though speaking, nevertheless, as though his mind was not quite made up. 'It's a bad job for you and the lady, sir. The men are terribly in airnest. They'll allow no speaking with ships, for fear of your blowing the gaff, as the saying goes. I may tell you you've acted wisely in falling in with their wishes. I may be more open by-and-by. I'm with you and the lady, sir; but I've got to be very careful.'

'I thank you sincerely.'

I saw him restlessly glance aft at the helmsman, and took the hint. His goodwill was of the utmost importance to me, and it would not do to imperil my relations with him by any sort of behaviour that might excite the suspicions of the crew as to our intimacy.

CHAPTER XXXV

MY CAPTAINCY

I AM arrived now at a passage of this singular adventure that will admit only of brief indications of certain features of it. To write down all the incidents of the time which followed could but run me into several volumes of very insipid matter. I own that when I look back upon this experience, it offers itself as something so

amazing, something so beside the most astonishing romantic incidents of sea-life which my memory carries, that, though I was the chief actor in it, I often at this hour find myself pausing as in doubt of the actuality of the events I have related and have yet to narrate.

Sometimes I wonder whether I might not have brought this kidnapping business—for thus it may fairly be called so far as Miss Temple and I were concerned—to a speedy end by peremptory refusal to navigate the ship to Captain Braine's island. But I have only to close my eyes and recall the faces and recollect the behaviour of the men who formed that barque's crew, to know better; I have only to re-people that now timeworn canvas with the countenances of those seamen, to witness afresh the looks and bearing of the carpenter, to recollect my defencelessness, the helplessness of my companion, whose life and whose more than life were absolutely dependent upon my judgment; to think of the wild greed raised in the men by their dream of thousands, their resolution to get the money, the sense of lawlessness that would increase upon them with the growing perception of their irresponsibility as a crew deprived of their officers by no crime of their own: I have only to recall all this along with my own thoughts and fears and bitter nerve-sapping anxieties, to understand that the course I adopted was the only practicable one open to me, and that what I did no other man situated as I then was but must have also done. But enough of this.

That afternoon, when the carpenter relieved me at four o'clock, I went below and superintended the preparation of the two cabins at the extremity of the cuddy for our reception. The berth adjoining the captain's was a fresh, bright, airy little apartment, and every convenience that Braine's cabin yielded was put into it for Miss Temple's use. This change of apartment seemed to tranquillise her a bit. Such was her dislike and fear of our steerage quarters, that I believe she would have thought the deck-house of the wreck endurable compared to them. Instead of a little 'tweendeck shrouded in gloom and lumbered with cargo, we had the whole breezy, sun-lit cuddy before us when we opened our doors. The berths were also well lighted, with something of taste in their equipment of panel, bulkhead mouldings, and the like. I was very careful to bring up Mr. Chicken's pistol and ammunition, and when I was alone with Miss Temple I said, 'You are not afraid to handle a firearm, I think?'

'Oh dear, no.'

'You shot very well, I remember, with Mr. Colledge at a bottle. Who hit the bottle?'

'I did.'

'So I might have thought by your manner of aiming at it. Your figure showed nobly, Miss Temple, in your posture as markswoman. I remember the sparkle of your eyes as you glanced along the barrel. I should not have cared to be hated by you and in front of you at that moment.'

'I wish I had the courage you feign I have,' said she.

'Well,' I exclaimed, pulling the captain's pistol out of my breast, 'here is a friend that will do more than bark for you, if you should find yourself in want of such help as it can give. I have a double-barrelled concern of a like build in the next room, so that between us we are able to muster three muzzles; artillery enough to fit us to stand a siege, I can assure you, with the ammunition we possess.'

She took the clumsy weapon in her small delicate white hand and toyed with it, levelling and examining it, and so forth. I bade her mind, as it was loaded. She smiled, and, going to her bunk, hid the pistol between the mattress and the bulkhead.

'I shall certainly feel easier for having it,' said she. 'You will not always now be next door, Mr. Dugdale. You will be for four hours at a time on deck, when you keep your watch.'

'Ay,' said I; 'but there is a skylight; and I'll take care that the cabin lamp be kept burning; and I have a keen ear, too, that when I am away from you will not be blunted by my thoughts always being here.'

My own cabin I found comfortable enough. I was not so choice as to be above using what I found in it. The unhappy captain had left behind him sufficient clothes to provide me with several changes; and a couple of his coats fitted me very well—being made, I suppose, to allow for a sailor's underclothing in cold weather—though I was much broader in the shoulders than he had been. I overhauled his papers, but found nothing of interest. What I met with I carefully put away in a drawer along with some money, and one or two objects of some small value, for I remembered that the unfortunate creature had left a widow behind him, who might be thankful for his poor effects, should the little ship ever live to carry his goods and his tragic story to a civilised place.

Wilkins waited upon us with punctuality and civility. He would ask me what I wished for breakfast and dinner and supper, bringing little suggestions from the cook as to sea-pies and shipboard hashes and currant dumplings and other heavy dishes, for the due digestion of which a man needs to have bowels of brass and the triple rows of the shark's fangs. Indeed, the *Lady Blanche's* larder was a poor one, and the genius of the first cook in the world must have come to a halt in the face of such a Mother Hubbard of a cupboard. Aft, there was little more to eat than the forecastle stores: salt beef and salt pork, peas, currants for duff days, biscuit, coffee and tea, and a few other items. However, the dead captain had laid in a good stock of bottled beer. There were also a few gallons of brandy and gin, both of them a very good spirit; and the forecastle stores, supplemented by cheese and hams and some tins of preserved stuff bearing the name of soup and bouilli—pronounced by sailors soup and bully, or soap and bullion—supplied us with dishes enough to enable us to support life and

even health, helped out as they were by occasional little relishes from the cook—feeble attempts, indeed, and briny to a degree, yet in their way welcome to people who were as good as beggars in food, and without choice.

Lush faithfully kept to his end of the ship. He never offered to enter the cabin except to my invitation, when perhaps I would have something in navigation to tell him about. He seemed anxious to keep us at a distance, and picked up the ship's routine, when his watch came round, as I let it fall, with an air of morose reserve. I made several efforts with an assumption of cheerfulness and heartiness of manner to break through his sullenness, with the dream of finding something like a human being of sensibilities behind it, whom I should be able to influence into getting the crew to consent to speak a passing ship, that Miss Temple might be transferred to her; but he was like a hedgehog; his quills regularly rose to my least approach. He would watch me with a sulky, cursing expression in his eye, or view me with a sour, askant regard, and to my civillest speech respond in some ragged, scurvy sentence.

But I did not play an obliging part with him very long. Having come to the conclusion that he was a ruffian of immovable qualities, I recurred to my earlier behaviour, addressed him only to give him instructions in a peremptory manner, or to point out the ship's place on the chart; so, as you will suppose, very little passed between us; yet my putting on the airs of a captain and treating him as the mere forecastle hand which he claimed to be, influenced his bearing, and rendered him even respectful.

Nevertheless, I knew that he and his mates never had their eyes off me, so to speak; that, having learnt the course to Cape Horn was so-and-so, the compass was watched with restless assiduity, every man as he was relieved at the wheel reporting the direction of the ship's head to his companions forward, and how she had been steering during his trick; that my behaviour on deck was critically followed by eyes in the fore part of the ship; that I could never give an order to trim sail during my watch but that it was duly reported to Lush, and weighed and considered by the crew in the frequent councils they held in the caboose. All this I was secretly informed of by Wetherly.

Yet I had nothing to complain of in the behaviour of the men. They sprang to my bidding, and their 'Ay, ay, sirs,' and responses to my orders had as lively and hearty a ring as anyone could hope to hear in the mouth of a crew. They sang out briskly when they pulled and hauled, with enjoyment of the sound of their own voices, and a marked willingness in their demeanour to contribute their utmost to the navigation of the vessel. This, indeed, was to be expected. It was rather a Jack's jaunt now with them, than a voyage; they were sailing, as they believed, to an island full of gold; their fortunes were assured; they gazed into

a future radiant with visions of dancing, drinking, marine jinks of all sorts ; they knew that the fulfilment of their fine lookout must depend upon the willingness to work the ship now, so that everything they did they did without a growl ; without the least hint of the mutinous disposition that would have shown strong and deadly in them had their wishes been delayed or obstructed.

But outside the actual, essential routine of the ship, nothing was done. The decks were washed down at very long intervals only ; there was no sail-making or repairing ; the spun-yarn winch was mute ; the chafing gear was left to rot off as it would ; the carpenter indeed saw to the rigging, took care that everything should be sound, for neither he nor his mates had a mind to lose a mast. But there was very little of sweeping or polishing, of swabbing or cleaning.

The rum was kept down in the steerage; every day Wilkins drew as much as sufficed to furnish the men with two glasses apiece. After drawing the stuff, he regularly presented himself with it to Lush or me, according as the one or the other of us was on deck, that it might be seen he had drawn the allowance only. The men seemed fully satisfied. There was never any demand for more grog than what was given to them, and I do not recall a single instance of intoxication ; which I attributed to my determined and oft-repeated declaration that should there be any exhibition of drunkenness on board the barque, I would abandon my undertaking, and leave the carpenter to navigate her. Dread of the consequences of drink amongst a mob of such ungoverned men as those fellows rendered me extraordinarily impressive and emphatic in this threat ; and I knew that the carpenter was convinced in his own mind that I would prove as good as my word. Indeed, I had only to look at Miss Temple to shrink from the mere thought of drunkenness amongst the sailors. All other risks that might attend a drinking bout forward were as naught compared to the peril *she* would stand in. The least insult offered her I should resent with the muzzle of my pistol ; and if it ever came to *that*, then God alone could foresee the character of the tragedy that must follow.

But, as I have said, they showed themselves satisfied with their two glasses a day. The sense of festivity never carried them further than an occasional dance on the forecastle head of a fine dog-watch, when they would diversify their caper-cutting with songs and yarns—all as harmless as child's play, so unsuggestive of the errand that we were upon, so dumb as indications of the smouldering fires which were to be blown into a blaze by want of judgment on my part, that anyone viewing us from the deck of a ship close at hand would have supposed the *Lady Blanche* the very peacefullest of traders, worked by the happiest and most liberally paid of crews, and bound on a voyage that was scarcely more than one of pleasure from port to port.

I was as eager as any man aboard to make an end of the voyage —to arrive, at all events, in the South Sea, where, let the problem of the island prove what it might, we should have come to the end of our expectations, and be able to see our way to the near future, that might signify a return home for me and Miss Temple; and consequently, I never spared the barque's canvas, but, on the contrary, would hold on every rag to the very last, leaving the white clipper hull to sweep through it at the pace of a comet. The carpenter used the little ship in the same way, and between us both, our runs in the twenty-four hours would again and again rise to figures that might have been deemed almost miraculous in those days of round bows and kettle bottoms, of apple sides, and a beam but a third less than the length. To be sure, when I was at sea professionally, I was never in a position to give an order, nor were the midshipmen, of whom I was one, regarded as much better than inconvenient ornaments, though we were well grounded in navigation; yet this command that had been forced upon me caused me no uneasiness; I would find myself walking the weather side of the poop as though I had been master of a ship for years; I knew, or thought I knew, exactly what to do, and the men sprang to my orders, and the little ship could not have been managed better had she been handsomely officered by men grown grey in the profession, instead of commanded by a young fellow who had only passed two years at sea a long while earlier, whose chief mate was a surly and sinister old rascal, so illiterate as to be unable to read his own name when written by another, and as incapable of handling a sextant as of expressing himself in correct English.

It came into my head once that we might run short of fresh water before we should arrive at that spot on the chart where the captain's gold was supposed to be buried, and I earnestly hoped that this might happen, since a threat of thirst must infallibly drive us for help to the first port we could manage to reach. I asked the carpenter if he knew what stock of water there was aboard. He said no, but promised to find out; and later in the day came to tell me that there were so many casks, making in all so many gallons—I cannot recollect the figures. To satisfy myself, I went into the hold with him, and discovered that he was right, and then entered into a calculation, which, to my secret mortification and disappointment, expressed a sufficient quantity of water aboard to last all hands of us at a liberal supply per diem for at least six months.

Now that I had assured myself as to the posture of the crew, and was profoundly satisfied in my own mind that their consuming eagerness to arrive at the island would guarantee a uniformly proper behaviour in them, unless they addressed themselves to the rum casks, or unless I gave them cause to turn upon me, I had no misgiving in suffering Miss Temple to be seen by them. She was therefore constantly with me on deck when my lookout came

round, and all the hours I could spare from sleep I dedicated to her society; so that it would be impossible to imagine any young unmarried couple passing the time in an association more intimate and incessant. At the beginning of this run to the South Pacific she showed a spirit that afterwards temporarily failed her. It was two days after I had consented to navigate the vessel that I observed a certain air of determination in her, as though she had been earnestly contemplating our situation, and had formed her resolution to encounter what might come with courage and patience. Then, after awhile, her pluck seemed to fail her again; I would find her sitting motionless in the cabin with her eyes fixed on the deck, and an expression of misery in her face, as though her heart were broken. I could not induce her to eat; though, God knows, there was little or nothing to tempt her with. She could not sleep, she told me; and the glow faded out of her deep and beautiful eyes. Pale she always was, but now her face took a character of haggardness, which her whiteness, that was a loveliness in her when in health, accentuated to a degree that was presently shocking to me. When on deck, she would take my arm and walk listlessly, almost lifelessly, by my side, briefly replying to me in low tones, which trembled with excess of grief.

Secretly loving her as I did, though not as yet had a syllable, nay, as I believe, had a look of my passion escaped me, I began to dread the influence of her misery upon my behaviour to the men. She was a constant appeal to me, so to speak, to call the fellows aft, and tell them that the girl was pining her heart away, that she must be put ashore or conveyed aboard another ship this side Cape Horn, though it came to our backing our maintopsail to wait for one, or that I would throw up my command of the vessel and refuse to sail her another mile. I say I lived in mortal fear of my being forced into this by sentiment and sympathy; for I was advised by every secret instinct, by every glance I levelled at the crew, by every look I directed at the carpenter, that the certain issue of such a resolution as that must involve my life!

I do not exaggerate in this; the nimbleness and sleekness of the crew were the qualities of the tiger; the ferocity of the wild beast was in them too, and for the girl's sake I recoiled in terror from the mere fancy of arousing their passions. How they might serve me if I showed myself stubborn in proposals which they declined to accept, I could not foresee; they might send me adrift in a boat; they might more mercifully knock me over the head in the dark, and toss what their weapons left of me overboard. I was unalterably convinced, at all events, that if I ceased to be of use to them, then, as the possessor of the secret of the island, I should be made away with. But Miss Temple they would keep with them! Of that I had no shadow of a doubt either; and hence I say I was in terror lest the spectacle of her misery should impel me to some act that, even whilst it was doing, my reason would pronounce madness.

I said everything I could imagine that I thought might reassure her, and one afternoon spent two hours in earnest talk with her. I told her that her grief was influencing me, and that it might come to my not being able to control myself in my relations with the crew; and I went on to point out what must follow if I suffered my sorrow for her to betray me into any other attitude towards the men than that I now wore. I had never been very candid in this way with her before, not choosing to excite her alarm and distress, and now I succeeded in thoroughly frightening her. It was enough that I should indicate the probability of her being left alone among the crew to fill her with horror. I need not give you the substance of my talk with her. So much remains to be told that I can only refer to it. But it achieved the end I had hoped to witness.

When next day came, I found some spirit in her voice and manner. Whilst we sat at breakfast alone, as we invariably were, whether in the cuddy or on deck, she exclaimed, viewing me with an earnestness which there was nothing in the faint smile that accompanied it to diminish:

'I have taken your lecture to heart, Mr. Dugdale, and I mean to reform. I have shown myself a sad coward; but you shall have no further reason to complain of me for that. I am ashamed of myself. I wonder that I have confidence enough to look at you when I compare my behaviour with yours. You have thought only of me, and I have thought only of myself; and that is the difference between us.'

'It puts a new pulse into my heart to hear you talk so,' said I. 'I want to conduct you home to your mother's side out of this wild adventure, with the same beauty and health that you brought away from England with you. It grieved me to the soul to see you refusing food, to watch your face growing hollow, to hear of your sleepless nights, and to witness in your eyes the misery that was consuming you. Pray keep this steadfastly in mind—that every day shortens our run to the South Pacific, and that every day this horrible experience is lessened by twenty-four hours. Whether there be gold in the island or not, whether the island have existence or not, the crew must still be dependent upon me to carry them to a port, and the port that is good for them will be good for us; for it will be strange if from it we are unable to proceed straight home. All along I have said it is but a question of patience and waiting, and God alone can tell how grateful I shall be to you if you will enable me to play the part that I know *must* be played if our safety is to be worth a rushlight.'

From this time she showed herself a thoroughly resolved woman. She ceased to tease me with regrets, to distress me with inquiries which I could not answer, to imply by her silence or her sighs or looks of reproach that I had it in my power by some other sort of policy than what I was pursuing, to get her safely away out of the barque. With this new mind in her came a subtle but appreciable

change in her manner towards me. Heretofore her behaviour had been uniformly haunted by some small flavour more or less defined of her treatment of me, and indeed of all others, saving Mr. Colledge, aboard the Indiaman. She had suggested, though perhaps without intending it, a sort of condescension in our quiet hours, with a deal of haughtiness and almost contemptuous command in moments when she was wrought up by alarm and despair. I now found a kind of yielding in her, a compliance, a complaisance that was almost tender, a subdued form of expression, no matter what the mood might be which our conversation happened to excite in her. At times I would observe her watching me with an expression of sweetness in her fine eyes, though these sudden discoveries never betrayed her into the least air of confusion or embarrassment upon which I might found a hope that I was slowly making my way to her heart.

However, I consoled myself by thinking that our situation hung in too black a shadow over her mind to enable her to guess at what might be going on in it. Besides, never a word had I let fall that she could construe into a revelation of my passion for her. Had I loved her a thousandfold more than I did, my honour must have held my emotions dumb. It was not only that my pride determined me to keep silent until I might have good reason to believe that my love would not be declined by this high and mighty young lady of the *Countess Ida*, with hidden wonder at my impertinence in offering it; I also was sensible that I should be acting the meanest part in the world to let her guess my feelings—by my language at least; my face I might not be always able to control—whilst she continued in this miserable condition, utterly dependent upon me for protection, and too helpless to avow any resentment, which she would be desperately quick to express and let me feel under other circumstances.

We should be entering the bitter climate of the Horn presently, and she was without warm apparel. Her dress, as you know, was the light tropical costume in which she had attired herself to visit the corvette. What was to be done?

'You cannot face the weather of the Horn in that garb,' said I on one occasion, lightly glancing at her dress, to which her noble and faultless figure communicated a grace that the wear and tear and soiling of the many days she had worn it could not rob it of. 'Needs must, you know, when Old Nick drives. There is but one expedient; I hope you will not make a grimace at it.'

'Tell it to me?'

'There is a good, warm, long pilot coat in my cabin. I will borrow needles and thread, and you must go to work to make it fit you.'

She laughed with a slight blush. 'I fear I shall not be able to manage it.'

'Try. If you fail, fifty to one but that there is some man forward who will contrive it for you. Most sailors can sew and

cut out after a fashion. But I would rather you should try your hand at it alone. If I employ a fellow forward he will have to come aft and measure you, and so on ; all of which I don't want.'

'Nor I,' she cried eagerly. 'I will try the coat on now, Mr. Dugdale. I daresay I shall be able to fashion it into some sort of jacket,' she added, with another laugh that trembled with a sigh.

I procured the coat, and helped her to put it on. It had been built for an overcoat, and designed to wrap up more than the narrow shoulders for which it had been fashioned, and it buttoned easily over the girl's swelling figure.

'Come, we shan't want a tailor after all,' said I, backing a step to admire her in this new, queer apparel.

'It will keep me warm,' said she, turning about to take a view of herself.

'And now,' said I, 'for a hat. That elegant straw of yours will not do for Cape Horn.'

I overhauled the captain's wardrobe, and unearthed three hats of different kinds—one of them a wideawake ; another, a cap of some kind of skin, very good to keep a night-watch in in dirty weather ; and the third, an old-fashioned tarpaulin glazed hat—the sire of the sou'-wester of our own times, though, to be sure, sou'-wester caps, as they were called, were in use at the beginning of the century. This example of head-gear I returned to the locker in which I had found it, but the other two Miss Temple thought she could make serviceable. She tried them on, stealing glances almost coquettish at me as she peered at herself in the looking-glass which I brought from her cabin.

There had been a time when nothing, I am persuaded, could have induced her to touch those hats. She would have shrunk from them with the aversion and disgust she had exhibited at Captain Braine's suggestions about the furnishing of her cabin in the steerage. Assuredly, Old Ocean was working a mighty change in her character. Life real, stern, uncompromising, was busy with her ; and just as Byron says of his shipwrecked people, that the mothers of them would not have known their own sons, so was I assured of my shipmate Louise that if it pleased God we should escape from the perils of this adventure, she would emerge a changed woman in every characteristic that had been displeasing in her before.

CHAPTER XXXVI

I CONVERSE WITH WETHERLY

Not to dwell too long on a detail of insignificance, it will suffice to say that by dint of rummaging the wardrobes of Captain Braine and Mr. Chicken I obtained several useful articles, and Miss Temple went to work to convert them into wearing-apparel for herself, with the help of a pair of scissors which I borrowed from

the carpenter, and needles and thread procured from amongst the men by Wetherly. The occupation was useful to her in other ways; it killed the tedious, the insufferably tedious time, and it gave her something to think of, and even something to look forward to, so blank had been the hours.

I remember coming out of my cabin after a spell of sleep to take sights shortly before noon, and finding her seated at the table with some flannel or fine blanket stuff before her, at which she was stitching—ripped up and violated vestments of either Braine or Chicken, but brand-new, or she would scarcely have meddled with them. She received me with a smile and a few words, and then went on sewing with an air as of gratification in her that I should have found her at work.

I halted and stood looking on, feigning to watch her busy fingers, whilst in reality I gazed at her face with a lover's delight. It was hard to believe that what was passing was something more than a dream, astonishingly vivid and logical. Again and again, when in the company of this girl, a sense of the unreality of our association had possessed me to such a degree at times that had the feeling continued, I might honestly have feared for my head. But never before this moment had that sense been so strong upon me. I forgot her beauty in my wonder. It was sheer bewilderment to recall her as she was on board the Indiaman; her haughtiness, her disdain, her contemptuous insensibility to all presences save that of my Lord Sandown's son, the cold glance of scornful surprise that would instantly cause me to avert mine—to recall this and how much more? and behold her now pensively bending her lovely head and face of high-bred charms over that sordid need of rough sailor's clothes, occasionally stealing a peep at me of mingled sweetness and a sort of wistful amusement, as though she grieved while she smiled at the necessity that had brought her to such a pass. Yet there was no repining; if she sighed, it was under her breath; forced as her light air of cheerfulness might be, it proved a growing resolution of spirit, a development of heroic forces, latent in her till recently.

Secretly, however, I was worried by keen anxiety. What was to be the issue of this voyage? I merely feigned a manner of confidence when talking with her about the result of this amazing ramble, as I chose to figure it. In reality, I could not think of the time when we should have arrived upon the spot where the dead captain had declared his island to be without dread. Suppose there were no island? What next step would the men take? The disappointment that must follow their long dream of gold might determine them upon plundering the barque—put them upon some wild scheme of converting her and her cargo into money. Or suppose—though I never seriously considered the matter thus—suppose, I would ask myself, that the island proved real, that the treasure proved real, that the men should dig and actually find the gold! What then? Was I to conceive that a

body of ignorant, reckless, lawless sailors, led by a man who was at heart the completest imaginable copy of a sea-villain, would peaceably divide the treasure amongst them, pay me over my share—which, God knows, I should have been willing to attach to Mr. Lush's feet on condition of the others throwing him overboard—and suffer me to quietly navigate the barque to an adjacent port, conscious that I owed them a bitter grudge for the outrage they had committed in forcing me and the lady to accompany them?

At long intervals I would exchange a few sentences with Joe Wetherly. Unfortunately, he was in the carpenter's watch, and my opportunities, therefore, for speaking with him were few. It was only now and again, when he was required to keep a lookout for Lush or myself, that I contrived to gather what was going forward amongst the men by engaging him in a brief chat before he quitted the poop. I was so sensible of being keenly observed by all hands, that I was obliged to exercise the utmost caution in speaking to this man. On the poop there was always the fellow at the helm to observe me; and the quarter-deck was within the easy reach of men stirring about the galley, or leaving or entering the forecastle.

However, it happened one dog-watch that Wetherly came aft instead of the carpenter to relieve me. Mr. Lush, he told me, felt unwell, and had asked him to stand his watch from eight to twelve. It was a clear night, but dark, the south-east trade-wind strong off the port beam, and the weather dry and cold, with a frosty glitter in the trembling of the stars which enriched the heavens with such a multitude of white and green lights that the firmament seemed to hover over our mastheads like some vast sheet of black velvet gloriously spangled with brilliants and emeralds and dust of diamonds and tender miracles of delicate prisms.

Miss Temple had left me some twenty minutes or so, and was now in the cabin, seated at the table under the lamp, with a pencil in her hand, with which she drew outlines upon a sheet of paper with an air of profound absent-mindedness. She wore over her dress a knitted waistcoat that had belonged to the captain; it stretched to her figure, and it was already a need, even in the day-time with the sun shining brightly, for we were penetrating well to the southwards, and every score of miles which the nimble keel of the barque could measure made a sensible difference in the temperature of even the shelter in the cabin. It was too dark to distinguish Wetherly until he was close. On hearing that he was to keep the deck until twelve, I determined to have a long chat with him, to get with some thoroughness at his views, which, to a certain extent, I had found a bit puzzling, and to gather what information I could from him touching the behaviour I might expect in the crew if there should be no gold, or, which was the same, no island.

The fellow who had come to the wheel at eight bells was Forrest, the supple, piratic-looking young sailor, whose walk, as he rolled

along the lee-deck, his figure swinging against the stars over the rail, had told me who he was without need of my going to the binnacle to make sure. Whilst Wetherly talked about the carpenter feeling unwell, I drew him aft, that we might be within earshot of Forrest, and said, as I turned to the companion hatch: 'I'll bring my pipe on deck, Wetherly, for a smoke after I've had a bite below. I wish to keep an eye upon the weather till two bells. Those green stars to wind'ard may signify more than a mere atmospheric effect.'

'Ay, ay, sir,' he answered, in a voice that made me see that he took my words in their most literal meaning.

I remained below until half-past eight, talking with Miss Temple, eating a little supper, and so on. I then fetched my pipe, and told her that I should be down again at nine, and that I did not ask her to accompany me, as I wished to have a talk with Wetherly. She fixed her dark eyes upon me with an expression of inquiry, but asked no questions. There had been a time when she would have opened the full battery of her alarm and anxiety upon me, but silence was now become a habit with her. It was her confession of faith in my judgment, an admission that she expected no other information than such as I chose to give her. I cannot express how this new behaviour was emphasised by the eloquence of her beauty, in which I could witness the curiosity and the apprehension which she had disciplined her tongue to suppress.

I left her, and went on deck. I first walked to the binnacle, into which I peered, and then in the sheen of it gazed very earnestly to windward and around, as though I was a little uneasy. The floating figure of Forrest swayed at the wheel, and I observed that he cast several glances to windward also. Muttering to myself, as though thinking aloud, 'Those green stars show uncommonly bright!' I went abruptly to the break of the poop, where the dark form of Wetherly was pacing, as though my mind were full of the weather.

'What's wrong with them stars, sir, d'ye think?' said he.

'Oh, nothing in the world,' I answered. 'They are very honest trade-wind stars. I wanted an excuse for a chat, Wetherly. Forrest has the ears of a prairie hunter. I'm not here to talk to you about the weather. You are the only man on board in whom I can confide. As we approach the Horn, my anxieties gain upon me. How is this voyage to end? By this time you pretty well understand the disposition of the crew. If there should be no island, what then, Wetherly?'

I noticed a cautious pause in him.

'Mr. Dugdale,' he answered, 'I'm heartily consarned for you, and for the lady too, and I may say particularly for the lady, who seems to me to be a born princess, a sight too good for such quarters as them'—he pointed to the skylight with a shadowy hand—'with naught but a dead man's clothes to keep her warm. If I could be of sarvice to ye, I would; but I've got to be as careful as you. Mr. Lush has such a hold upon the minds of the crew that

there's nothen he couldn't get 'em to do, I believe ; and if he should come to suspect that there's anything 'twixt you and me, any sort of confidence that ain't direct in the interests of the fo'c'sle, it 'ud go as hard with me as I may tell 'ee it certainly would with *you* if you was to play 'em false.'

This speech he delivered in a low key, with frequent glances aft and at the quarter-deck below. I listened with patience, though he told me nothing that I was not fully aware of.

'But what course, Wetherly, do you think these men will adopt if on our arrival at the latitude and longitude named by that unhappy madman as the spot where his treasure lies, there should be no island?'

'Well, sir,' he responded, preserving his cautious tone, 'I can answer that question, for it's formed a part of the consultations the crew is agin and agin a-holding. They'll think ye've dished 'em, and that o' purpose you han't steered a true course.'

'Ha!' I exclaimed; 'and what then?'

'You'll have to find the island, sir.'

'But, my God, Wetherly, if it be not there! There is no rock marked on the chart in the place that was named by Captain Braine.'

'They'll keep ye a hunting for it,' said he grimly.

'And if we don't find it?'

'Well, I can't tell 'ee *what* they'll do. All they've said is, "If it ain't there, it'll be because he don't mean it shall be." But I've heard no threats—no talk of what 'ud follow.'

'If there should be no gold, no island,' said I, 'my opinion is that they will seize upon the ship and cargo, and compel me to navigate her to some port where they will find a market for their plunder.'

'And where will that be?' he asked.

'Impossible to say. Lush will probably know. He has the airs and appearance of a man to whom a performance of the kind I suggest would be no novelty. I may tell you now, Wetherly, and, indeed, I might have done so long ago, that it was the carpenter whom Captain Braine charged with murder.'

'Well, sir, you'll excuse me. I'm not for believing that, Mr. Dugdale. That Lush has been a rare old sinner, ye need only watch him by daylight and hear him talk in his sleep at night, to know; but, as I said afore, when ye mentioned it—murder'—I saw him wag his head by the starlight—'I'd choose to make sure afore believing it on the evidence of a madman.'

'But don't you think the carpenter and, let me add, most of the crew, equal to the commission of any crime?'

'Well, I won't say no to that now with this here glittering temptation of money getting into their souls, to work everything that may be evil in 'em out through their skins. I wouldn't trust 'em, and so I tell 'ee, Mr. Dugdale; and if this here barque was any other ship than the *Lady Blanche*, and my mates any other

men but what they are, I'd be content to pawn for sixpence all that I've got in my chest.'

I came to a stand with him for a while at the weather rail in feigned contemplation of the weather.

'Wetherly,' said I quietly, as we resumed our crosswise walk, 'my position is a frightful one. Were it not for the cursed lunatic fancy that that shambling villain Wilkins overheard—the completest lie that ever took shape in a madman's brain—I might hope to be able to tempt the crew with a handsome reward to allow me to sail this ship to a port whence the lady and I could get home. But what could I offer, with honest intention to pay, that should approach the thousands which those fools yonder dream about day and night?'

He made no answer.

'Supposing, Wetherly,' I continued, 'I should determine, in a mood of desperation, to drop my command here, and refuse to navigate the vessel another league unless Miss Temple and I are put ashore?'

'You know what 'ud happen,' he cried; 'ye've said it o'er and o'er agin, hitting upon what's most likely. For God's sake, sir, clear your mind o' that scheme, if it's only for the lady's sake!'

'But what's to follow upon our arrival in the Pacific?' I exclaimed with an emotion of despair.

'There's nothen to be done but to wait,' he answered gloomily.

'Do you believe that every mother's son forward believes in the existence of the treasure?'

'Every mother's son of 'em, sir. The belief mightn't have been so general, I dare say, if it hadn't been for them documents you signed. Ignorant as the men are, they know how to git four out of two and two. First, there's the drawing on that there bit of parchment; then there was the capt'n's yarn of how he come by the gold, as ship-shape to the minds of the men as if they'd seen him fetch it out of the Bank of England; then comes the plot of getting rid of 'em at Rio, with a crew of Kanakas to follow; and then a company of beachcombers atop of them, to carry the barque on. Here alone's a thought-out scheme proper to convince an atheist. But then follows them documents o' yourn to prove that you, a born gent of eddication and first-class intelligence, don't doubt the truth o' what ye hear, and, to make sure, provide for your share when the gold's come at and for your security, if so be as the law should lay hold on the capt'n for a-deviating.'

'It's all very true,' I exclaimed, staggered myself by the consistency of the wretched business, and forced to mentally admit the reasonableness of the illiterate creatures in the forecastle accepting it all as indisputable. 'But you know my motive in acting as I did?'

'Well, I *do*, sir. As I told ye, I was a bit nonplushed at first; but it's a madman's yarn—ne'er a doubt of it. And I'm as wishful, Mr. Dugdale, as ever ye can be to be quit of the whole blooming job.'

Again I came to a pause at the weather rail, as though I lingered on deck only to observe the weather.

'Now, Wetherly, listen to me,' said I. 'You know you are the only man in the ship that I would dream of opening my lips to. You have my full confidence; I believe you to be sound to the core. If you will give me your word I shall be perfectly satisfied that you will not betray me.'

'Whatever ye may tell me, Mr. Dugdale,' he responded in a voice slightly agitated, 'I swear to keep locked up in my bosom; but afore I can give ye my word, I must know what I've got to take my oath on.'

'You misunderstand me,' I exclaimed; 'I desire no oath. Simply assure me that should a time ever come when I may see my way to escape, you will stand my friend; you will actively assist me if you can—you will not be neutral; I mean, merely my well-wisher; simply tell me this, and I shall know that when an opportunity arises, I will have you to count upon.'

'Have you a scheme, first of all, Mr. Dugdale?' he inquired. 'There's no good in my consenting to anything that's a-going to end in getting our throats cut.'

'No; I have no scheme. What plan could I form? I must grasp the first, the best chance that offers, and then it may be that I will want you. There are others besides myself whom you would find grateful. Miss Temple's mother is a lady of title, and a rich woman——'

'Excuse me, Mr. Dugdale,' he interrupted; 'I don't want no bribe to bring me into a proper way of acting, if so be as that proper way ain't a going to cost too much. I'll say downright, now, that if I can help you and the lady to get out of this job and put ye both in the road of getting home, ye may depend upon my doing my best. More'n that there'd be no use in saying, seeing that it ain't possible to consart a scheme, and that we must wait until something tarns up. If there be an island, and we bring up off it, the sort of opportunity you want may come, and you'll find all of me there. If the island be a delusion, then something else 'll have to be waited for. But I tell you as man to man that I'm with you and the lady, that I don't like Mr. Lush nor the business he's brought the vessel's crew into, but that I've got to be as cautious as you; which now means, sir—and I beg that you'll onderstand me as speaking respectfully—that that there Forrest has seen us together long enough.'

'Right,' I exclaimed, grasping his hand; 'I thank you from my heart for your assurance; and Miss Temple shall thank you herself.'

With which I went aft, gazing steadfastly to windward as I walked, and after a final peep into the binnacle and a slow look round, I stepped below.

There was little to comfort me in this chat with Wetherly; it was worth knowing, however, that he regarded the captain's

yarn as a mere emission of craziness ; for heretofore, in the few conversations I had had with him, his hesitation, his cautious inquiries, his manner, that in a superior person would to a certain extent have suggested irony, had caused me to see that his mind was by no means made up on the subject. This, then, was to the good, and it was satisfactory to be informed by him that he would befriend us if an opportunity occurred, providing his assistance should not jeopardise his life. I was grateful for this promise, but scarcely comforted by it. I carried a clouded face into the cabin ; Miss Temple, who awaited my return to the cabin, fixed an anxious gaze upon me, but asked no questions.

'How good you are to suppress your curiosity !' I exclaimed, standing by her side, and looking into her upturned face ; 'you incalculably lighten my burden by your forbearance.'

'You have taught me my lesson,' she answered quietly ; 'and as a pupil I should be proud of the commendations of my master.' She pronounced the word 'master' with a glance of her proud eyes through the droop of the lashes, and a smile at once sweet and haughty played upon her lips.

'It will comfort you to know that Wetherly is our friend,' said I.

'I have always regarded him as so,' she responded.

'Yes ; but he has now consented to aid me in any effort I may by-and-by make to escape with you from this barque.'

She was silent, but her face was eloquent with nervous eager questioning.

'Moreover,' I proceeded, 'Wetherly is now convinced that Captain Braine's gold was a dream of that man's madness. A dream, of course, it is. But do you know I am extremely anxious that we should find an island in that latitude and longitude of waters to which I shall be presently heading this ship.'

'May I ask why ?'

'Because I think—mind, I do but think—that I may see a way to escape with you and Wetherly alone in this barque.' She breathed quickly, and watched me with impassioned attention. 'In fact,' I continued, 'even as I stand here, looking at you, Miss Temple, a resolution grows in me to create an island for Captain Braine's gold, should the bearings he gave me prove barren of land.'

'Create ?' she exclaimed musingly.

'Yes. The South Sea is full of rocks. I'll find the men a reef, and that reef must provide me with my chance. But,' I exclaimed, breaking off and looking at my watch, 'it is time for me to seek some rest. I shall have to be on deck again at twelve.'

'I shall go to bed also,' she exclaimed ; 'it is dull—and there are many weeks before us yet.' She smiled with a quivering lip, as though she would have me know that she rebuked herself for complaining. 'I believe you would tell me more if you had the least faith in my judgment.

'At present, I have nothing to tell; but an hour may come when I shall have to depend very largely upon your judgment and your spirit also.'

She met my eyes with a firm, full, glowing gaze. 'No matter what task you assign to me,' she cried with vehemence, 'you will find me equal to it. This life is insupportable; and I would choose at this instant the chance of death side by side with the chance of escape, sooner than continue as I am in this horrible condition of uncertainty, banishment, and misery.'

'That may be the spirit I shall want to evoke,' I said, smiling, whilst I held open her cabin door. 'Good-night, Miss Temple.'

She held my hand a moment or two before relinquishing it. 'I hope I have said nothing to vex you, Mr. Dugdale?' she exclaimed, slightly inclining her fine head into a posture that might make one think of a princess expressing an apology.

'What have *I* said that you should think so?' I answered.

'Your manner is a little hard,' she exclaimed in a low voice.

'God forgive me if it be so,' said I. 'Not to you, Miss Temple, would I be hard.'

My voice trembled as I pronounced these words, and abruptly I caught up her hand and pressed her fingers to my lips, and, bowing, closed the door upon her and entered my own berth.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CAPE HORN

It was on one of the closing days of the month of December that my longitude being then some three leagues east of the easternmost of the Falkland Islands, and my latitude some fifty-five degrees south, that I brought the barque's head to a west-south-west course for the rounding of Cape Horn. It was happily the summer season in those parts—their midsummer, indeed—and I was glad to believe that the horrors of this passage would be mitigated by a sun that in the month of June shines for scarcely six hours in the day over the ice-laden surge of this, the most inhospitable, the most bitterly dreary tract of waters upon the face of the world.

Down to the latitude of the Falkland Islands we had sighted, from the hour of my taking command of the barque, but four sail, so vast is the ocean, and so minute a speck does a ship make upon it. But whilst the loom of the land about Berkeley Sound was hanging in a blue and windy shadow, with a gleam as of snow upon it away out upon our starboard beam, we fell in with a whaler, a vessel rigged as ours was; a round-bowed, motherly old craft, jogging along under a load of boats suspended over her sides from the extremities of thick wooden davits. There was a long Atlantic swell running, and as she rose and rolled to it, she showed a line

of green sheathing dark with moss and barnacles and lines of trailing weeds.

She had been visible at daybreak right ahead, and she was clear upon the sea over our bow, when I came on deck shortly after eight bells to relieve Lush, who had had the watch since four o'clock.

'What have we there?' said I, bringing Braine's old leather telescope out of the companion and putting my eye to it. 'A squab old whaler, as I may suppose by her boats; Cape Horn top-gallant-masts; a sawed-off square sea-wagon after the true Nantucket pattern.'

'I've been a-waiting for you to come on deck,' said the carpenter. 'We don't want to run her down. We've got nothen to say to her, and so 'ud better keep out of hail. Shift the course, will you, sir?'

There was nothing in the *sir* to qualify the offensive tone of command with which he addressed me. I looked at him fixedly, taking care, however, to keep a good grip on my temper.

'What are you afraid of?' I asked. 'Are any of the crew likely to hail her if we pass within speaking distance?'

'I'd like to know what man there is amongst us as 'ud have the courage to do it,' he exclaimed, his face darkening to the thought, and his eyes travelling up and down my body, as though in search of some part on which to settle.

'Why do you wait for me to shift the helm, man?' said I.

'The navigation's in your hands,' he answered sullenly; 'if your calculations don't turn out correct, it musn't be because of any man a-meddling with the course whilst you was below.'

Miss Temple at this moment arrived on deck and joined me.

'A pity to run away,' said I; 'we're sailing three feet to that chap's one, and will be passing him like smoke. There's been nothing to look at for a long time. It'll be a treat to our shore-going eyes to see a strange face, though we catch but a glimpse. You don't think *I'll* hail her, I hope?'

'*I* hope!' he responded with a coarse ironical sneer and a rude stare of suspicion.

'By God, then!' said I, with an effusion of temper I instantly regretted, 'since you have forced this command upon me, I'll take what privileges it confers, and be hanged to it! My orders are to keep the ship as she goes. If you disobey me, I'll call the crew aft, and charge them to observe that any miscalculations in my navigation will be owing to your interference.'

The fellow scowled, and looked ahead at the vessel, and then at a knot of sailors who were standing at the galley, and I could see that he was at a loss; in fact, a minute after, never having spoken a word, during which time he frequently sent his gaze at the craft over the bow, he abruptly crossed to the lee side of the deck and fell to patrolling, coming now and again to a stand to leeward of the sailor at the helm, with whom he would exchange a few words,

whilst he swayed on his rounded shanks, with his arms folded upon his breast, occasionally stooping to obtain a view of the whaler under the curve of the fore-course.

It was his watch below, and at another time he would have promptly gone forward. His remaining on deck signified an insulting menace, an impudent threat to watch me, and to guard his own and the crew's interests against me. But I was resolved not to seem to notice his behaviour, nor even to appear conscious of his presence. We were carrying a grand sailing wind out of the south, and under a main top-gallant sail and a boarded main tack, the barque was sweeping nobly over the powerful heave of the long Pacific swell, and through the tall surges which were breaking in foam far as the eye could reach, with deep blue lines between. At intervals, some great hill of waters sparkling to the flying sunshine would flash into foam to the buoyant rise of the glittering metalled fore-foot of the speeding, milk-white fabric, and cloud her forecastle in a storm of snow. The wind sang in the rigging with a frosty note, but the shrewd air was dry, without any sting of ice, though there was no warmth whatever in the white splendour of the leaping sun.

The men, observing that Lush kept the deck, came out of the galley and forecastle, and with abrupt shifting motions gradually drew aft to the line of the quarter-deck rail, which they overhung, feigning to watch the ship we were overtaking, though nothing could be more obvious than their real motive in drawing aft in this fashion. Wetherly alone kept forward. He stood leaning in the galley door, smoking a short pipe in as careless and unconcerned a posture as you would look to see in a lounging fellow sailing up the river Thames.

'The brutes are terribly in earnest,' said I to Miss Temple, as we stood together under the lee of the weather quarter-boat for the shelter of it. 'If ever I had had a doubt of the wisdom of my conduct in this business, the presence of that group yonder would extinguish it for good and all.'

'Forgive me,' she exclaimed; 'but were you well advised in not altering the course of this vessel?'

'The fellows must not know that I am afraid of them, or believe me to be without some resolution of character.'

'What would happen were you to attempt to hail that ship there?' she asked, with her eyes enlarging to the fear that accompanied the question, and her lips quivering as they closed to a blast of wind sweeping in a long howl betwixt the rail and the keel of the boat.

'I do not intend to hail her,' I replied; 'and we will not, therefore, distract our minds with conjectures. Let us rather wonder,' I went on, forcing a light air of cheerfulness upon me, 'what those whalemen will think of you when they catch a sight of your figure? Will they take you to be captain or chief mate?'

She smiled, and slightly coloured. Indeed, at a little distance,

with the rail to hide her dress, she would very well have passed for a young man, habited as she was in Captain Braine's long pilot coat and his wide-awake, which entirely hid her hair to the level of her ears, and which she kept seated on her head by means of a piece of black tape passed under her chin. But shall I tell you that her beauty borrowed a new and fascinating freshness of grace from the very oddity of her attire? For my part, I found her more admirable in the perfections of her face and form, grotesquely clothed as she was, than had she come to my side but now from the hands of the most fashionable dressmaker and the most modish of hairdressers and milliners.

The name of the old whaler lifted clear in long white letters to the heave of her square stern off the spread of froth that raced from under her counter: *Maria Jane Taylor* was her title, and I remember it now as I can remember very much smaller matters which entered into that abominable time. The green and weedy and rust-stained fabric, heeling to the pressure of the wind, and making prodigious weather of the Pacific surge as she crushed into the violet hollow with a commotion of foam such as no whale which ever her boats had made fast to could have raised in its death-agony, swarmed and staggered along with frequent wild slantings of her spars, upon which her ill-patched sails pulled in disorderly spaces. A whole mob of people, black, orange-coloured, and white, stared at us from under all kinds of singular headgear over her weather rail, and a man swinging off in the mizzen shrouds, apparently waited for us to come abreast to hail us. As our clipper keel swept in thunder to her quarter, scarcely more water than a pistol-shot could measure dividing us, Lush came up from to leeward and stood beside me, but without speaking, simply holding himself in readiness—as I might witness in the sulky determined expression in the villain's face—to silence me if I should attempt to hail. I glanced at him askant, running my eye down his round-backed muscular figure, and then put on a behaviour of perfect insensibility to his presence.

'How touching is the sight of a strange face,' said I to Miss Temple, 'encountered in the heart of such a waste as this! Rough as those fellows are, how could one take them by the hand! with what pleasure could one listen to their voices! Would to God we were aboard of her!' And I brought my foot with a stamp of momentary poignant impatience to the deck.

Our own crew staring at the whaler over the quarter-deck bulwarks were incessantly bringing their eyes away from her to fix them upon me with a manner of angry suspicion that it was impossible to mistake. The noise of the roaring of the wind in her canvas was loud in the pouring air; the blue waters foamed viciously to her tall catheads, and her green and rusty bends showed raggedly amid the frothing, foaming, and seething curves of the boiling smother rushing past her; here and there aft was the muddy glint of a disc of begrimed window amid the line of her

seams, out of which all the caulking appeared to have dropped. We were passing her as a roll of smoke might.

'Barque ahoy!' bawled the long slab-sided man in the mizzen rigging in the nasal accents of the 'longshore Yankee.

Lush at my side stood grimly staring. Several of the crew on the quarter-deck were now watching me continuously.

'What barque air you?' came in a hurricane note out of the whaler's mizzen shrouds.

There was no reply from us.

'Barque ahoy, I say!' yelled the man with a frantic gesture of astonishment; 'where air you bound, and what ship might you be?'

The *Lady Blanche* rushed on; nevertheless, we were yet so close to the whaler even when we had her on our quarter that I could easily distinguish the features of the man who had hailed us as he hung motionless as though withered by some blast from the skies, in the mizzen rigging, with his mouth wide open, whilst an expression of inimitable amazement was visible in the rows of faces along the bulwark rail, white and coloured alternately, like the keys of a pianoforte.

On a sudden the man sprang out of the mizzen shrouds on to the deck; his legs were immensely long, and he was habited in a short monkey jacket. He started to run for the forecastle, and his prodigious strides made one think of a pair of tongs put into motion by some electrical power. He gained the forecastle head, where for one moment he stood surveying us, then bringing his hands to his face, he made what is known to school-boys as a 'long-nose' at us, turning a little sideways, that we might clearly observe the humiliating derisiveness of his posture. In this attitude he remained whilst a man might have counted twenty, then turning his back upon us, he smote himself with a gesture of utmost scorn upon a part of his body which the short skirts of his monkey jacket left partially exposed; after which, with the air of a person whose mind has been relieved, he leisurely made his way aft, thrice, as he walked, turning his profile, that we might observe him lift his thumb and fingers again to his nose. A little while later the old whaler was plunging amid the white throbbings of her own churning a long mile astern; and in half an hour she looked to be scarcely more than a gleam out in the cold blue air, where there seemed a dimness in the atmosphere as of the blowing of crystals off the melting heads of the high seas.

It was not till then that Lush left the deck.

This little incident was as stern a warrant of the disposition of the crew as they could have desired to make me understand. It proved their possession of a quality of suspicion, of a character so ungovernably insolent and daring, that I might well believe, were it transformed into passion by disappointment or insincerity on my part, there was no infamy it would not render them equal to. I often wonder in recalling this time that I should have found

strength to bear up under my anxieties. The future lay absolutely in blackness. I had some hope, some vague fancy, rather, let me call it, of lighting upon an island, should Braine's prove the chimera I feared it was, that might enable me to contrive a stratagem to effect our deliverance from this unspeakable situation. But there was nothing in such an imagination as this to cast the faintest light upon the gloom ahead. I would cudgel my brains in my lonely watches at night with vehement struggles in search of any idea that might be shaped into a method of escape. At intervals I would secretly and warily converse with Wetherly; but he had no other proposals to make than the soul-depressing one of patience, with regular assurances, indeed, that he would stand by me if his help could be safely ventured.

In these despairful considerations I even went to the length of fixing my thoughts upon the boats. When we should have rounded the Horn and entered the mild parallels of the Pacific, sparkling nights of tranquillity were sure to descend upon us, and furnish me with an opportunity of leaving the barque with Miss Temple; an opportunity, I say, so far as the weather and the peace of the sea might be concerned; but how with my single pair of hands was I to lower a boat, provide that Miss Temple should be in her, provide also that the little fabric should be stored with food and water, then unhook her, and slide away into the gloom, all so privily, all so noiselessly as to elude the vigilance of the man at the helm and of the seamen in my own watch sprawling about the decks forward?

It was not to be done. I did not even suggest this method of deliverance to Wetherly, feeling perfectly convinced that he would not entertain it. And suppose I should be able to successfully get away with the girl in this manner, how dreadful would be our outlook!—with oars, indeed, but without masts or sails, lying exposed for God alone could tell how long a time in the heart of one of old ocean's mightiest deserts, not traversed then, as in these days; scarcely penetrated, indeed, save at long times between, by such a whaler as we had passed, or by some vessel trading to the Polynesian groups from the western South American seaboard.

I do not know that I considered myself very fortunate because of the fine weather which attended the barque in her passage of the Horn. Far better, I sometimes thought, than the strong southerly breeze, the flying skies of dark winter blue, the brilliant rolling and foaming of long arrays of billows brimming in cream to the ivory white sides of the little ship, and aiding her headlong flight with floating buoyant liftings and fallings that timed the measures of her nimble sea-dance with her waving mastheads as the batôn of a band conductor keeps the elbows of his fiddlers quivering in unison—far better might it have been for us, I would often think, had the month been the mid-winter of the Horn, with heavy westerly gales to oppose our entrance into the Pacific Ocean, and fields of ice to hinder us yet, with some disaster on top to

force us to bear away as the wind might permit for the nearest port.

The rounding of this iron headland was absolutely uneventful; the wind blew almost continuously from the southward, and throughout was a strong and steady breeze, that enabled me to show whole topsails and a maintopgallant-sail to it. Once only did we sight ice, a distant spot of a luminous, crystal-like whiteness upon the throbbing limits of the sea. Day and night the water in white clouds poured in thunder from either bow of the rushing barque; the clouds soaring from out the Antarctic solitudes down behind the ocean line, swept in smoke athwart our trucks; by day the small white sun danced amongst these fleeting shadows in the north, and flashed up the sea into a very dazzle at each blinding launch of his beams, so multitudinous were the peaks of froth which glanced back the sparkling emissions of the luminary; by night the dark skies were filled with stars of a frosty brilliance, amid which burned the jewels of the Southern Cross with the Magellanic clouds beyond dim as curls of vapour. A fire was lighted in the little stove in the cabin, and by it, during my watch below, Miss Temple and I would sit exchanging our hopes and fears, speculating upon the future, endeavouring to animate each other with representations of our feelings when we should have arrived home, and amid safety and comfort look back upon the unutterable experiences into which we had been plunged by so trifling a circumstance as a visit to a wreck.

Thus passed the time. Every day I obtained a clear sight of the sun, and then striking the meridian of 76° West, I headed the barque on a north-north-west course for Captain Braine's island, the declared situation of which I calculated would occupy us about three weeks to reach.

It was on the afternoon of the day on which I had shifted the barque's helm, that Wilkins came to me as I sat at dinner with Miss Temple with a message from the carpenter to the effect that he would be glad of a word with me. I answered that I was at Mr. Lush's disposal when I had dined, but not before. This did not occupy another ten minutes in accomplishing; my companion then withdrew to her cabin, having with much eagerness expressed a number of conjectures as to the carpenter's motive in soliciting an interview.

The man came off the poop by way of the quarter-deck, and entered the cabin with his skin cap in hand.

'I obsarve,' said he, 'that you've altered the vessel's course.'

'That is so,' I rejoined. 'Wetherly was on deck when I left my cabin after working out my sights, and I believed he would have reported the change of course to you.'

'No; it was Woodward [one of the sailors] that was at the hellum. He calls me over and points into the binnacle and says: "'Ye see what's happened?" The men 'ud be glad to know if it's all right?'

'If what is all right?'

'Why, if this here course is true for the island? They'll feel obliged if ye'll let 'em in here and show 'em the chart and 'splain the distance and the course and the likes of that to 'em yourself.'

I hardly required him to inform me of their wishes, for I had but to direct my glance at the cabin door to observe them assembled on the quarter-deck awaiting the invitation the carpenter had come to demand; all hands of them, saving Wetherly and the fellow that was steering, called Woodward by Lush.

'Certainly: let them enter,' said I; and at once fetched my chart, which I placed upon the table, and went to the other side, ruler in hand, ready to point and to explain.

The body of rough men, a few of them with their mahogany lineaments scarcely visible amidst the whiskers, eyebrows, and falls of front hair which obscured their countenances, stood looking upon the chart with Lush in the thick of them, and Forrest's mutinous, dare-devil, rolling face conspicuous over the carpenter's shoulder.

'Now, men, what is it you want to know?' said I.

'We're a steering by the compass up above nor'-nor'-west,' answered Lush; 'will ye be pleased to tell us how ye make that right?'

I had to fetch a pair of parallel rulers to render my answer intelligible to the illiterate creatures who stood gaping at me with an expression of dull struggling perception that would come and go in a manner that must have moved me to laughter at another time.

'What part of this here paper is the island wrote down upon?' demanded Forrest.

I pointed with my ruler, and the whole knot of faces came together as they stooped with a sound as of a general snore arising from their vigorous breathing.

'How far is it off from where we are?' inquired one of the men. I told him. Several questions of a like kind were put to me; a growling ran amongst them as they hummed their comments into one another's ears. Meanwhile, I stood inspecting them with mingled inquisitiveness and disgust. What a miserable pass had the wretches brought the girl and me to! What bitter anxieties had they overwhelmed us with! What was to be our future so far as they should have a share in the creation of it? I sought in vain amidst their various countenances, composed of hair and warts and beards of leathery skins, of moist eyes dim with weather, of the smooth cheeks of two or three of the younger fellows—I sought in vain, I say, for a single expression to assure me of the existence of qualities upon whose generous response I might depend, should it ever come to my having to entreat them. Yet they presented, as I long ago said, just such exteriors as you would expect to meet with in the sailors of a humble trader like the *Lady Blanche*.

'Well, men,' exclaimed the carpenter, 'there ain't no doubt to my mind. It's all right; and I'm bound to say stan'ing here, that con-sidering that Mr. Dugdale guv' up the sea a good bit ago, he's managed oncommonly well down to this here time.'

There was a murmur of assent. I thought I would take advantage of this momentary posture in them of appreciation, perhaps of concession.

'Since you are all before me,' said I, 'two excepted, let me ask you a question. You are aware, of course, that from the very beginning of this business I have regarded your whole scheme as the effect of a madman's dream.'

Lush stared at me with an iron face; Forrest, with an impudent grin, shook his head; two or three of the fellows smiled incredulously. I proceeded, eyeing them deliberately one after the other, and speaking in the most collected tones I could command.

'I want to know this: If Captain Braine's island should have no existence in fact, what do you men propose to do?'

'No use putting it in that way!' exclaimed the carpenter, after a brief pause, and a slow, sour wagging of his head; 'the island's there. 'Tain't no dream. Ye'll find it right enough, I'll warrant.'

'It was described to me,' I went on, 'as little more than a reef. This is a big sea, men. A reef is easily missed in such an ocean as this.'

'You have its bearings,' exclaimed Forrest defiantly; 'if you put the barque in the place on the chart where the captain said the island is, how are we agoing to miss it, unless all hands turns puppies, and keeps a lookout with their eyes shut?'

'But,' said I, preserving my temper, 'may not this hope of obtaining a large treasure have rendered you all very considerably over-confident? Suppose there is no island. Reason with me on that supposition. Imagine that we have arrived, and that there is nothing but clear water. Imagine, if you will, that we have been sweeping those seas for a month without heaving into sight your late captain's reef. What then, I ask? What next steps have you in your minds to take? I have a right to an answer, even though I should address you only in the name of the young lady whose protector I am.'

The fellows glanced at one another. Their low, suspicious intelligence manifestly witnessed some strategic fancy underlying my question.

'Look here, Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed the carpenter, 'there's no use in your a-putting it in any other way than the way we want, and the way we mean to have.' He accompanied this with a violent nod of the head. 'Though we're plain men without e'er a stroke of book-learning amongst us, we ain't to be made fools of. The island's where 'ee can find it, if ye choose, and to that there island we're bound, sir;' and he bestowed another emphatic, malevolent nod upon me.

I gazed at the fellows in silence. One glance at the array of

mulish countenances should have satisfied me that there was nothing in anything I could say to induce in them other views than those they held, or to render endurable to them a discussion that must be based upon a probability of their being disappointed.

'We've stuck to our side of the bargain, sir,' said one of them.

'Ay,' cried the carpenter; 'I allow that let the gent strive as he may, there's nothen he can find in the treatment him and the lady's met with from us men to complain of.'

'I do not complain,' I exclaimed; 'have you on your side any reason to complain?'

'No, sir, and we don't want none,' the fellow responded with a look that rendered his words indescribably significant.

'You are satisfied, I hope,' said I, 'with the explanation I have given you as to the situation and course of the barque?'

'Yes,' answered the carpenter, with a look round.

'Then there is nothing more to be said,' I exclaimed, and, picking up the chart, I carried it into my cabin.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LAND!

Our progress was slow. For some while we carried strong winds, which swept us onwards into the softer climates of the Pacific; they then failed us, and were followed by a succession of light airs, as often ahead as astern. I was astonished, however, by the yacht-like qualities of motion of the little barque. Through weather that had scarcely weight enough in it to have stirred the *Countess Ida* the *Lady Blanche* would sneak over a surface of water that was often glass-like, ripples fine as wire breaking away from her keen stem, and a short wake scoring the liquid smoothness under her counter; her topsails and courses motionless, save but for their soft swaying to the long and gentle respiration of the swell; a faint lifting, however, perceptible in the light cloths of the loftier sails, which were doing the work of the rest, and communicating to the little fabric out of the delicate softness of the blue Pacific heavens, so to speak, an impulse of vitality, the recollection of which would move me to amazement when I found that our progress in the twenty-four hours had been as considerable as the Indiaman would have got out of a pleasant breeze.

But not to linger upon this time—though I could tell much of my incessant intimate association with Miss Temple—dwell with delight, untinctured by recollection of the miseries and anxieties of this passage, upon the memory of the soft and lovely nights of those delicious parallels, the clear dusk radiant with the glistening of stars from sea-line to sea-line, the mild atmosphere sweet with dew, the hush upon the slumbering leagues of the deep, soothing as a benediction to the perturbed spirit, the play of delicate fires

in the water, the stirring of canvas in the still gloom aloft, as of the brushing of the pinions of hovering creatures: then the wide blue sparkling scene of day, the barque clothed in the ivory whiteness of her canvas striking a prismatic shadow of pearl from her white sides and silken heights into the opalescent profound, on which she would rest as on a bed of glass, some distant fountain and curve of wet black body denoting the rising of a leviathan from the depths—ah! had all been well with us, this would have made a noble time for the memory to muse on—but my story draws me to its conclusion.

It was February the 18th, as very well indeed do I remember. From the hour of our having sighted the whaler off Cape Horn, we had met with nothing, not even of the bigness of the tip of the wing of a sea-fowl, to break the continuity of the sea-line, no shadow of low-lying land, no vision of star-like space of water indicating the froth of the submerged reef. On this day at noon, having worked out my calculations, I discovered that the distance to Braine's island, as I may call it, from the then situation of the barque, was to be traversed, if the light air held as it was, in about twelve hours; so that it would be proper to keep a lookout for it at about midnight.

I gave Mr. Lush this piece of news; he received it with a flush of excitement that almost humanised the insipid coarseness of his dull, wooden, leather-bound, weather-hardened visage.

'Ye may calculate upon our keeping a bright lookout, sir,' said he with a grin that disclosed his tobacco-coloured fangs, and that might fairly be called sardonic, since the eyes bore no part in this disagreeable expression of satisfaction.

I watched him walk forwards to convey the information to the men. They went in a whole body on to the forecastle, and stood staring about them, as though the ocean wore a new countenance to their gaze, now that they believed Braine's island to be a short distance past the slope of it. The carpenter pointed, and was full of talk; there was much lighting of pipes, expectoration, puffing of great clouds indicative of emotion, uneasy, impatient, flitting movements amongst the men, some of whom presently broke up into couples, and fell to pacing the forecastle like marines on sentry; talking, as I did not doubt, of the money they were going to dig up, what they would do with it when they had it, and so on; the expressions on their faces varying at every instant, one emotion suppressing another in a manner that to a contemplative and leisurely eye would have provided a study at once ludicrous and informing.

I had the watch that afternoon; and when Miss Temple and I had eaten our little midday meal, I drew chairs into the shadow of the short awning, and we sat together, I, pipe in mouth, occasionally quitting her side to take a look outside the edge of our canvas roof, along with a brief stare ahead, for I could not be sure of Captain Braine's chronometer, nor of the exactness of my

own calculations, and if the madman's island was where he had declared it to be, it might heave into view off either bow or right ahead at any moment, for all I could tell.

Miss Temple stood in no need now of Captain Braine's overcoat. She was habited in the costume of the *Countess Ida*; somewhat soiled it was, yet the perfect fit of it continued to atone for its shipwrecked airs. Her dark eyes glowed under the shadow of the straw hat she had had on when she left the Indiaman. She needed but her jewelry, the flash and decoration of her trinkets, to show very nearly as finely as she had on that day. There was but little alteration visible in her. For my part I could detect no more than that her face was a trifle thinner than when we had first entered on this wild adventure. The eye of close and constant association would not indeed witness changes which might instantly be perceptible to one encountered after an absence. Still, I had the image of her brilliant on my mind as she was on board the Indiaman, and viewing her now, as I say, I could perceive no other change than what I have mentioned. Intellectually, however, there was an alteration, defined to a degree to my sight. Her gaze was softened, and was often sweet. The characteristic firmness of her lips had lost its air of haughtiness. There was no longer any manner of command in her looks, nor of exaction in her fixed regard; there was nothing to hint that her spirit was broken—merely that it had been bowed to an average human level by the rough usage of the sea, and by the amazing experiences with which her months of lonely association with me had been surcharged.

Heretofore, that is to say for some weeks past, she had exhibited a resigned, calm, resolved behaviour, as of one who was constantly schooling herself to prepare for an issue of life or death. She had long ceased to utter a complaint; she would even detect a sigh in herself with a glance of contrition and self-reproach. Again and again had I complimented her upon the heroic qualities which her sufferings of mind and body had fructified in her; but this afternoon she was feverishly impatient and restless. The old fires of her spirit when alarmed were in her eyes. I would observe her struggling in vain to appear composed. As we sat together, she exclaimed, as she brought her eyes to my face from a nervous sweeping gaze at the horizon over the bows: 'By this time to-morrow we shall know our fate.'

'Perhaps not. Yet I pray it may be so. If I were sentenced to be hanged, I would wish the hour come. But what is to be our fate? Nothing in this life is so bad or so good as our fears or our hopes would have us think. If there should be no island——Well, those villains will find me on the alert for what may come along in the shape of chance, and you must be ready.'

'I am ready,' she exclaimed; 'only tell me what to do. But this expectation——.' Her lips trembled, and her white fingers clenched to the agitation that possessed her. 'The misery is, Mr. Dugdale, you have no scheme.'

'That will come,' I exclaimed; 'be calm, and remain hopeful. I might, in the language of the heroes of novels, hope to reassure you by promising that if we are to perish we will perish together. I am not a hero, and I talk with the desire and the intention of living. There may be a few more adventures yet before us; but your hand is in mine, and I shall not relinquish it until I conduct you to your mother's side.'

Of course I talked only to cheer her; yet I hoped even as I spoke, and my hope gave a tone of conviction to my words that seemed to animate her, and she smiled whilst her wistful eyes sank, as though to a sudden reverie.

During the rest of the day the crew were ceaselessly on the move, passing in and out of the galley and in and out of the forecastle, pacing the planks with impatience strong in their rolling gait; one or another of them from time to time springing on to the headrail to peer thirstily and steadfastly under the shelter of his hand; one or another again at long intervals ascending to the height of the foreroyal yard, there to linger, whilst the fellows below gazed up with expectant faces, and ears greedy for a cry from that lofty summit. The sturdy figure of the carpenter was conspicuous amongst them. When he came aft, he would look as though willing to converse with me, but I walked away abruptly on his approach, and if I chanced to leave the cabin when he was on deck, I kept to the lee side, contriving an air that even to his unintelligent gaze must have conveyed the assurance that I wished to have nothing to do with him.

The breeze was light, just forward enough on the beam to allow of the foretopmast studding-sail remaining abroad. So weak was the air, that the barque crept along with erect spars, and the red fly of the dogvane scarcely flickered to the soft breathings at the royal mast head. I feared that it would fall a dead calm at sundown, but, greatly to my satisfaction, there was a small freshening in the breeze whilst the scarlet yet lay gloriously upon the cloudless countenance of the west. Indeed, my own almost crazy anxieties and expectation made the mere fancy of a spell of stagnation abhorrent to me. Supposing the chronometer below to be correct, I was in little doubt of the accuracy of my computations, and my desire to verify or disprove the madman's assurance was consuming and insupportable.

When the night descended it was moonless, and through the pleasant blowing of the wind, of a singular sweetness and freshness such as I could not imagine of darkness in any other ocean. The water was now streaming in a line of whiteness along either side, and the murmur under the counter was as constant as the voice of a running brook heard amid the stillness of a summer night. The carpenter had the watch from eight to twelve; but for my part I could not find it in me to go to my cabin. Such was my feverishly restless condition, that I knew I should close my eyes in vain, and that the inactivity of a recumbent posture would speedily

grow irksome and intolerable. Miss Temple entreated me to lie down upon the locker in the cabin. I answered that I should be unable to sleep, and that without sleep the mere resting of my limbs would be of no service to me.

'But you will have to watch from twelve to four,' she exclaimed, 'and at this rate you will get no sleep to-night.'

I smiled, and answered that Braine and the carpenter between them had murdered sleep; and then took her on deck, where we walked and conversed till the hour of eleven—six bells. I then returned with her to the cabin. She declined to enter her berth; she begged me, and her eyes pleaded with her voice, to suffer her to remain at my side throughout the night. But this I would not hear of; I told her that such a vigil would exhaust her, that her utmost strength might have to be taxed sooner than either of us could imagine; that she must endeavour to obtain some repose upon the locker, and that if anything resembling land showed during my watch, I would call her. I saw a look of reproachful remonstrance in her face; but compliance was now a habit with her, and in silence she allowed me to arrange a pillow and to throw a light blanket, that I fetched from her bed, over her feet. I sat near her at the table, leaning my cheek on my elbow, and from time to time exchanged a few words with her. There was hardly any movement in the sea. The wind held the canvas motionless. The seething alongside was too delicate to penetrate, and the silence in the little cuddy was unbroken save by the ticking of a small brass clock under the skylight, and by the measured tramp of the carpenter overhead.

A little before twelve I looked at my companion, and perceived that she was asleep. On the eve, as I believed we were, of God alone knew what sort of events, the spectacle of the slumbering unconscious girl, whose beauty was never so affecting as when softened, and I may say spiritualised by the expression of placid repose, moved me to the heart. What a strange association had been ours! How intimate had we become! what confidences had our common suffering caused us to exchange! what condition of shoregoing life was there that could have brought this girl and me together as we had been and still were? How I loved her, I was now knowing; I could dwell upon my passion with delight as I looked at her, though on the threshold of a future that might prove terrible and destructive to us both. What was the secret of her heart, so far as I was concerned? I gazed at her lips with some unintelligible hope of witnessing them shape the syllables of my name; then the clear chimes of eight bells floated aft. With a sigh and a prayer, I dimmed the cabin lamp and went softly to the companion steps.

On my emerging, the carpenter came up to me.

'It's been blowing a steady air o' wind,' said he; 'allowing for this here improvement in our pace, what time d'ye reckon the island 'll take to show itself?'

'If it exists,' I answered, 'it might be in sight now. The captain's description showed that there was no height of side to make a loom of. If you're going forward see that a couple of hands are stationed on the forecastle, and tell them to keep a bright look-out. We don't want to run the reef down, if it's there.'

'Ay, ay, sir,' he exclaimed in the rough off-hand voice of a sailor receiving an order, and left the poop.

The time crept away. There was a light burning in the galley; and the shapes that flitted in and out through the open door, throwing giant shadows upon the hazy square of illumination on the bulwark abreast of the galley entrance, satisfied me that most if not all of the men were awake and on the lookout. Several figures, never less than two, paced against the stars over the bows with the regular tread of sentinels, clear on the forecastle under the forecourse by the spaces of the spangled sky they blotted out as they moved. The breeze continued a pleasant air, and all about the gliding barque were the summer tinkling sounds of water gently broken. Occasionally, I would go forward, and taking my stand on the rise of the cathead where it sloped to the rail, strain my eyes into the elusive starry dusk where sea and sky seemed to melt into liquid gloom. No one accosted me as I passed to and fro. Once I heard the tones of the carpenter in the galley warm in argument. The fellows pacing the forecastle would come to a halt whenever I went forward, and stand looking at me in silence, full of expectation, no doubt, of my being able to see more than they. The very barque herself seemed to participate in the emotions, the breathless curiosity, the avid yearnings of the men who awaited the appearance of the island with restless motions and voices subdued into low growling notes: the ship herself, I say, seemed governed by the impassioned expectation of the hour, so tremulously breathless was she aloft, so still and subtle was her movement through the water, so hearkening the aspect of her forward, as though the stirless curve of her jibs were ears which she eagerly projected that she might catch the first sound of the wash of surf.

All this while Miss Temple lay soundly sleeping below.

It was wanting about ten minutes to four when the quarter-deck was suddenly hailed from the forecastle. The voice rang loud and startlingly upon the ear used to the continued stillness of the night.

'Hallo!' I cried.

'There's something dark right ahead,' came back the answer.

I whipped the glass out of the companion, and walked swiftly forwards where all the crew had run to the first cry, and where I found them standing in a huddle of shadowy shapes at the rail, some pointing, and all looking in one direction.

'Where away is the object reported?' I exclaimed.

'Yonder,' cried the carpenter, stepping out of the little crowd and projecting his arm almost on a line with the jib-boom end.

I instantly perceived it! It was just a streak of shadow, low-lying, like a line of cloud beheld by night lifting a few fathoms of its brow above the sea-line. I pointed the telescope; and the lenses without revealing features, resolved the length of airy obscurity into the firm proportions of land.

'Is it the island, sir?' demanded the carpenter in a voice hoarse with excitement.

My own astonishment—the wonder raised in me by yonder prompt settlement of the incredulity that had possessed me from the first minute of hearing the captain's story—the conflict of emotions which followed on my considering that the land ahead must inevitably be Braine's island, since the chart showed clear water to the distance of the latitude of Easter Island, which the low stretch over the bows most assuredly was not, the loom being little more than that of a reef—rendered my ear deaf to the carpenter's inquiry. He repeated his question.

'If not, then I know not what other land it can be,' said I. 'How far distant will it be, think you?'

The men gathered about us to hear what was said.

'Three mile about,' he answered.

'More like five,' grumbled out a seaman.

'Five in your eye!' cried another—'more like *tew*. If ye'll stay your breathing, you'll hear the wash o' the surf.'

'Better shorten sail and wait for daylight, Mr. Lush,' said I.

'Ay, ay, sir,' he answered; 'that'll be the proper thing to do;' and instantly fell to bellowing out orders.

The uproar of the excited crew clewing up and hauling down, yelling as they pulled at the ropes, and springing about with an alacrity that made their darting figures resemble those of madmen, awakened Miss Temple. I stood alone on the poop, endeavouring to obtain a view of the land by leaning over the rail, when she came up to me.

'What is it, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Land!' I exclaimed, instantly turning to her.

'The island!' she cried, suppressing astonishment until she should have received my answer.

'I have no doubt of it. The shadow indicates that it is little more than a reef. Its bearings, according to my computation, accurately correspond with those given by Captain Braine.'

She projected her head over the rail, but was some time before she could distinguish the mere dash of gloom that the land made upon the horizon.

'If it should be the island!' she cried. 'That you should have steered this ship straight as an arrow for it, and that it should be there—no madman's dream, as we have both believed it! If one part of the story be true, the other part should be so.'

I was too astounded to converse. I could do no more than ejaculate. To be sure, as my companion had said, if the story of the island was true, the story of the gold might be equally true.

There would be the treasure, then, for the men to possess themselves of ! And afterwards ?

My brains seemed to whirl like a teetotum in my skull.

Meanwhile, the sailors had reduced sail till the barque was now under topsails only, the rest of the canvas hanging from the yards in the grip of its gear. The carpenter arrived on the poop.

'Mr. Dugdale,' he exclaimed, in a rough, congratulatory voice, 'you've done wonderfully well, sir. By —— ! but I don't think there's e'er a navigator would have struck it true as a hair as ye have. Ye've got no doubts now left, I allow ?' and I saw his face darken with the wrinkles of the grin that overspread his countenance.

'What's to follow ?' I demanded, thinking to take advantage of his mood.

'Why, the gold,' he answered, 'the money, sir; what we've been a-waiting for; and what I suspects we'll most of us know what to do with when we gits it.'

'And then ?'

'That'll be a matter for consideration,' he answered, drawing off and going to the rail and staring ahead.

'Back the topsail yard and bring the ship to a stand, Mr. Lush,' said I, 'and get a cast of the lead, will you ?'

These orders were immediately obeyed. The lead ran out to the whole scope of line without touching bottom. There was nothing now to be done but to wait for daylight. A whole eternity seemed to pass before the dawn broke. Then to the sifting of the dull gray faintness over the rim of the eastern sea, the land came stealing out, till, to the sudden soaring of the sun into the clear blue sky of the Pacific morning, it flashed out into its full proportions and distinctive features not a mile off our port beam as we then lay with our maintopsail aback.

The crew, neglecting all discipline and shipboard habit, were assembled in a body on the poop; and thus we all stood looking, I a little distance away from them with Miss Temple at my side. It was a small coral island, apparently of the dimensions that Captain Braine had named. To the northward the smooth water brimmed to a long shelf of coral grit, lustrous as snow in the sparkle of the early sunshine. There was a small rise, green with vegetation, in the centre of the island; how far distant, I could not imagine. Almost abreast of us, the land went in with a semicircular sweep like to a horse-shoe, and was exactly the lagoon that had been described by Captain Braine. In the centre of it, just as he had marked the thing down upon his chart, rose a coral formation of the appearance of a very thick pillar, and at the distance from which we surveyed it, it might easily have passed for a monument of white stone erected by human hands, the decorated summit of which had been rudely broken off by a tempest or some volcanic shock. On a line with this pillar, some little distance up the beach of the lagoon, were several clumps of trees. There was a deal of a sort of stunted

vegetation going inland from the margin of the little bay, coarse grass, as my telescope made out, tangles of bushes, and so on.

The carpenter in the midst of the men stood with the parchment chart in his hand, pointing out how the outlines corresponded with those of the land, amidst a hubbub of eager comments and exclamations of excitement. For my part, I could not credit my senses; I disputed the evidence of my own eyes; I brought them away from the island to fix them with an emotion of profound bewilderment upon Miss Temple.

'Can it be real?' I cried. 'After the weeks of conviction of the utter madness of this quest, am I at last to be persuaded that the wretched suicide was not mad, that his island is a fact, and his gold an absolute reality too?'

I turned my back upon the crew to press my hands to my eyes to ease my brow of an intolerable sense of swooning in it.

'Three cheers for him, men!' I heard the carpenter roar out. Volley after volley of huzzas rang from the deep sea lungs of the sailors. They were cheering me. I turned to find them all looking my way. They tossed their caps and flourished their arms like madmen in the exuberance of their delight.

'Now, sir,' sung out the carpenter, 'hadn't we better see to our ground tackle?'

'As you will,' I answered; 'there is your island; I have kept my word with you; now, Mr. Lush, the crew will proceed as they think proper. When you require my services again as a navigator I am ready;' and, so saying, I seated myself on the edge of the skylight, and with folded arms continued to view the island with such astonishment and incredulity as made me fear for my head.

'Is it all for the best, do you think, Mr. Dugdale?' said Miss Temple, who had seated herself beside me.

'I cannot tell—it may be so. If they find the money, the wretches' delight and good temper may render them willing to comply with my wishes to make for the nearest port. I am in a dream. Give me a little time to recover my amazement. You know it ought to be impossible that that island should be there.'

She glanced at me anxiously, with something of alarm indeed, as though there was even a greater strangeness in my manner than in my language. Long hours of anxiety, long hours of sleeplessness, the continual apprehension of what was to follow if this island was not discoverable—these things, and how much more?—had done their work with me; and now on top was come the shock of the discovery of the truth of what I had all along been convinced was the dream of a madman—the lie of a crazy head! I felt a moisture in my eyes; my limbs trembled; my breathing grew thick and difficult. In silence, Miss Temple hurried below, and returned with a tumbler of cold brandy grog. She put it into my hand, and I drank it off; and I have very little doubt that the strong stimulant—such a dose as might have made me boozy in an

hour of ease!—rescued me from an attack of hysterics, man as I am who tell this!

Meanwhile the seamen had gone forward, and were all hard at work with the chain cables, connecting them with the anchors, affixing tackles, hoisting the ponderous irons to the catheads, and filling the barque with business and songs. They worked with desperate will and eagerness, yet their progress was slow, and the sun had mounted many degrees before all was ready forward for bringing up. They then went tumultuously to breakfast, which they devoured upon deck, emptying their hook-pots down their throats, and hastily eating their biscuit and meat, whilst they jabbered away in voices of enthusiasm, one calling out a joke to another amidst loud laughter.

The carpenter had now taken command. He came aft while Miss Temple and I nibbled at some breakfast which Wilkins had brought us on deck, and ordered the maintopsail to be swung, and stationed a hand with a lead-line in each of the main chains. The wind was about south, and allowed the barque with her yards braced fore and aft to very nearly look up for the lagoon. We crept slowly along; the lead on either hand went in frequent flights towards the bow, but no bottom was reported. This went on till the yawn of the lagoon was upon our starboard quarter, with the trend of the land covered with bushes opening out as it ran into the south-east, and then came a shout from the port main chains. The water now shoaled rapidly; a man stood forward ready to let go the anchor; down thundered the topsail yards to the cry of the carpenter to let go the halliards; the barque lost way; the sharp clank of a hammer rang through the vessel, followed by a mighty splash, and the roar of iron links torn in fury through the hawse-pipes.

In a few moments the *Lady Blanche* was at rest, with the western spur of the lagoon within half a mile of her.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE ISLAND

The men now went to work to get tackles on to the yards, in order to hoist the longboat over. This again ran into time, for the boat stood in chocks, and was stoutly lashed to the deck; and before they could remove her, they had to clear away the spare booms which were stowed on top of her and clean her out. When they had her alongside, they passed water and provisions and several gallons of rum into her, with other matters of this sort, of which I hardly took notice. They also handed down the shovels used for the little stock of coal that was carried in the fore-peak, and several crows, handspikes, and whatever else they could lay their

hands upon that would enable many of them at a time to dig up the soil.

Whilst all this was doing, I remained seated on the poop with Miss Temple. I was now feeling better and stronger again, could think rationally, and astonishment was worn out.

'It is most unmistakably the island that Captain Braine named,' I said to the girl, speaking with my eye at the telescope. 'I remember he spoke of a clump of trees at the foot of which the treasure lies hidden. Yonder are several clumps. Which one of them will it be, I wonder? and will the money be there? What an astonishing romance will it prove, should those sailors fall in with a booty of nearly two hundred thousand pounds!'

'What are they going to do, do you think, Mr. Dugdale?'

'It looks to me as if the whole body of them were going ashore to dig.'

'Are they not taking a deal of provisions with them?'

'They may mean to make merry. After months of shipboard life, the touch of the land will be grateful to the soles of their feet. Let them find the gold! their transports will know no bounds; there will be some wild skylarking amongst them before they come off, or I am greatly mistaken. Would to God they would make themselves drunk, that I might run away with the ship.'

'Cannot that be done when they are on shore?' she cried with an air of exultant entreaty in her sudden leaning towards me as she spoke.

'Yes, were an off-shore gale to come on to blow, I might contrive to slip and let the barque storm out to sea before it. But in this weather! They would be after me in a jiffy in their boat, and then God help me when they got hold of me!'

A shade of paleness overspread her face, and she regarded me with a look of consternation, as though violently affected by the fancies my simple sentence had put before her. I sprang on the top of the hencoop to sweep the sea-line with the telescope, but could nowhere discern the least shadow of land. As I put down the glass, the carpenter came off the quarter deck, where, at the gangway, he had been busily shouting out instructions and overseeing the work of preparing the boat, and approached me. He held Captain Braine's parchment chart, at which he stopped to look for a moment when he was yet some paces distant.

'Will ye tell me what's your opinion of the weather, sir?' he exclaimed, in a voice whose natural gruffness and surliness were not to be sweetened by the satisfaction that was merely visible in a small symptom of respecfulness in his bearing.

'I do not know, I am sure. This cloudless sky should be full of promise. The mercury in the captain's cabin promises fair weather.'

'What do 'ee think of letting them sails hang?' said he, sending his malevolent gaze aloft; 'or shall we tarn to and roll 'em up

afore we go ashore?—though it'll be a long job,' he added, directing his eyes thirstily at the island.

'The ship is in your hands,' said I.

'Oh well,' he exclaimed, as though gratified by my admission, and sending a slow look round the sea; 'we'll let 'em be as they are for the present. The anchor's got a good grip, I allow; if so be as a breeze should come along, we can send some of the men aboard to furl the sails.'

We! thought I, as I regarded him in silence.

'My sight ain't what it used to be,' he continued: 'yet I can see enough of that there island'—and here he began to fumble with the chart he held—'to guess that this here's a first-rate likeness of it. This,' said he, pointing with his square thumb at the mark in the middle of the lagoon on the parchment, 'is one of the bearings we've got to have in mind to find out where we're to begin to dig, ain't it?'

'I believe so,' said I.

'Didn't ye put down the particulars of the spot in writing?' he inquired, looking up at me from the chart.

'No,' I answered shortly.

'How many feet was the money hid away from the wash of the water?' he demanded.

'It was in paces, I remember,' I returned, 'but the figure is entirely gone out of my head. Wilkins should be able to recollect.'

He ran with a sort of dismay to the break of the poop and bawled for Wilkins. The lad came half-way up the steps. The carpenter spoke to him and then returned.

'The young scowbanker don't recall,' he exclaimed. 'He believes—a curse on his believes!—that the captain spoke of four hundred feet. Was that it, sir?'

'I remember enough to make sure that it was not four hundred feet,' I answered.

He picked up the glass and levelled it at the island.

'Which of them clumps of trees was it that the capt'n talked to ye about?' he asked whilst he looked.

'He did not describe any particular clump. It was to be found by measuring so many paces from the edge of the water of the lagoon yonder, the pillar bearing something west, but what I can't tell you. I treated the story as a madman's dream, and dismissed all the particulars of it from my mind.'

'We'll have to try all them clumps, then, that's all,' said he, with a hard face and a voice at once sharp and coarse with ill-subdued temper. 'We'll get the money, though it comes to having to dig up the whole island. And now, sir, there's nothen to stop us—the boat's ready—if you'll be pleased to come along.'

'I can be of no good to you,' I exclaimed with an involuntary recoil; 'you have hands enough to dig. I'll stop here.'

'No, if you please; we shall want you,' he said, with a stare of dogged determination.

'I must not be left alone, Mr. Lush,' cried Miss Temple, with a painful expression of fear in her bloodless face. 'If Mr. Dugdale goes, I must accompany him.'

'No, mem. You're safe enough here. We must have Mr. Dugdale along with us to show us what to do. For Lord's sake, no arguments, sir! The impatience of the men 'll be forcing them to taking you up in their arms and lifting you over the side, if you keep 'em waiting.'

'But am I to understand,' I exclaimed, 'that all hands of you intend to quit the ship, leaving this lady alone on board?'

'Joe Wetherly and Jim Simpson 'll remain,' he replied; 'they'll keep a lookout, and two's enough with us men in hail of their voices. Now, sir, if you please.'

The crew standing in the gangway were looking my way with signs of irritation in their bearing. I merely needed to give one glance at the carpenter's face to satisfy me that temper, protest, appeal, would be hopeless; that refusal must simply end in my being bodily laid hold of. I was urged by every instinct in me to a policy of conciliation. To irritate the fellows would be the height of folly; to provoke the indignity of being seized and roughly thrust into the boat, the utmost degree of madness. My resolution was at once formed.

'I will accompany you, Mr. Lush,' I said. 'Get you gone on to the quarter-deck whilst I say a few words to comfort my companion.'

He walked away to the gesture with which I accompanied this request.

'Miss Temple, pray take heart. Wetherly is one of the two men who are to be left. You will feel safe here with him on board till I return.'

'Until you return!' she cried, with her eyes full of misery and horror. 'I shall never see you more!'

'Oh no; do not believe such a thing. The men imagine I shall be of service to them in lighting upon the spot where the gold is. They cannot do without me as a navigator. They will bring me off with them when they leave the island.'

'I shall never see you again,' she repeated in a voice of exquisite distress. 'Why could they not have left us together here?'

'Now, Mr. Dugdade, if *you* please,' bawled the carpenter from the head of the poop ladder.

I took and pressed her hand between mine, and then broke away from her. What had I to say, what to offer, that she could convert into a hope? I felt the danger of continuing to view her in her despair and helplessness, for already it was producing in me a rage against the men that must be suppressed at all costs. I turned to smile and to wave my hand, and found her with her back upon me and her face buried.

Wetherly and the man who was to be left with him stood a little forward of the main-hatch looking on. As I stepped to the

gangway I called out : 'Wetherly, and you, Simpson : I leave the lady behind me ; she is alone. You will see to her, men, I beg.'

Simpson gazed stolidly, as though not understanding me ; indeed, there was no countenance amongst the sailors from which all meaning appeared to have been so entirely discharged as his. Wetherly smiled, and flourished his hand with a significant glance. He would perfectly comprehend that I had included Simpson as an excuse to appeal to him only. Without another word I dropped into the main-chains and jumped into the longboat.

When the men had entered, there were ten of us in all. The boat was a roomy, stoutly-built fabric, and her oars were almost as long as sweeps. The barque's quarter-boats would have been too small for this service ; for the ten of us made a body, and they had handsomely stowed her besides with water and rum and provisions (as you are aware), not to mention the sundries with which they proposed to dig the soil. I rather wondered that they should have supplied themselves so hospitably, till I recollected that Captain Braine had said there was no fresh water and nothing to eat upon the island. The carpenter had no doubt remembered this as a passage in the story which Wilkins had overheard and repeated. It might be also that they intended to stay awhile on this island when they had dug up the gold, to refresh themselves, with the substantiality of land under their feet, for a day or two after their long months of the heaving sea ; in which case they would naturally convey what they required at once, to spare themselves the trouble of a trip to the ship.

Their leaving Wetherly behind was due, I took it, to the indifference and doubt he had exhibited from the commencement ; possibly, they might also have some notion, by requiring him to remain on board, to cheat him of a portion of his share ; and since they considered that two were necessary to watch the barque, they would find a willingness to remain in her only in the stupidest man amongst them, who, to be sure, was Simpson. These were thoughts which hurriedly passed through my mind even whilst the fellows were in the act of shoving off. There was neither sail nor mast in the boat. Probably they considered that those things would encumber the thwarts, whilst, in fact, there was no real need for them, since the vessel lay within a very easy pull. Four fellows threw their oars over, and the boat clumsily broke the smooth water to the impulse of their blades.

When we were clear of the shadow of the barque's side, I turned to look for Miss Temple, and observed her seated in a posture of utter despondency upon the skylight. I stood up and flourished my hat ; but she made no sort of response. She remained motionless, as though stupefied and insensible. I resumed my seat, breathing hard with the wild mood that possessed me; but I was not to be suffered to sit in silence. The carpenter plied me with questions, which he only ceased that the others might have a chance of making inquiries. Couldn't I remember how many paces it was

that the captain had said? Would it be one hundred? Would I turn to and think a bit? A gent's eddicated memory was always better than plain men's, who weren't no scholards. If the right number of paces wasn't hit upon, it might take 'em a week to find the spot. And what about the bearings? Couldn't I recollect exactly how the trees bore from that there pillar? Wherever the gold was, it couldn't lie deep hid, for there was but two men to bury it, and them weak with shipwreck, and they wasn't going all the way down to hell to make sartin of a secret nook.

To all this I had to listen and reply as I best could. Yet it was talk to put a fancy that had long haunted me—that had haunted me, I may say, from the time of some of my earliest conversations with the carpenter—into shape, out of which arose one instantly present keen perception: that gold or no gold, they must be kept hunting for it!

It was a cloudless day; the sky a true Pacific blue, a mild breathing of wind off the island; and the sun, that was already at his meridian, flung a wide splendour upon the air that was without an insufferable excess of heat. The longboat floated into the lagoon, the bottom of which showed like a pavement of white marble trembling through the blue, glass-like translucency. I looked carefully about me, but could see no signs of the hut which Captain Braine told me he had built, and out of which he had crawled to find the Yankee surveying craft hove-to abreast of the island. Neither were there any other relics of his shipwreck visible: such as the bottles, casks, tins, and so on, which, according to his account, he and his companion had landed from the brigantine. It is true that a good many years had elapsed since the date of the wreck as he had given it me, and in that time the island might have been visited or swept by seas and hurricanes. The sailors did not appear to heed the absence of all memorials of Captain Braine's having landed here.

'The Spanish craft 'll have come ashore yonder,' said the carpenter, standing erect, referring to Braine's story, and indicating by an eager nod of the head the position of the stretch of lustrous beach that looked northwards, but that was now invisible to us. 'Where'll be a good place to land here?'

All hands were staring about them. The fellow named Forrest said: 'There's a bit of a tree there that 'll hold the boat secure. Better let her lay afloat, Mr. Lush, 'case of a change o' weather and having to shove off in a hurry.'

'Ay, she 'll lie all right off that tree,' exclaimed the carpenter. 'In oars, lads! Let her slide quietly stem on. I've heard of coral spikes a-tearing of boats' bottoms out.'

A few minutes later most of us were ashore, the boat lying quietly secured by a line to a small but solidly rooted tree, and two or three fellows in her handing out her freight of odds and ends to the others.

The feel of solid land under my feet was a singular sensation.

I had now been incessantly at sea for a time that was growing rapidly into six months, and after those interminable weeks of heaving shipboard, the immovability of this coral rock affected me as something in the greatest degree novel. I sent a hurried glance around; but the eyes I had strained from over the rail of the barque had acquainted me with every material point of the island, and this closer survey yielded nothing fresh. The margin of the beach of the lagoon went gently sloping up from hard coral to a species of soil that appeared to possess some qualities of fertility, for the tall coarse grass was very plentiful and of a most vivid green. The few groups of trees were also richly clad, and the bushes extraordinarily abundant. There were no signs of life of any sort saving birds, of which a score or two were wheeling about in the air over the northward fronting beach. The inland rise was a mere small green acclivity probably not above thirty feet to the summit. All was silent, desolate, lifeless; nothing to hear amid the brief intervals of stillness among the men save the delicate noise of the soft wind amongst the foliage, and the melancholy moaning of surf from the other side of the island.

Everything was landed; the men seized hold of the various implements they had brought with them to dig up the soil; the carpenter flourished a shovel and called to me: 'Mr. Dugdale, have ye no recollection of the number of paces?'

'None whatever,' I responded.

'What d'ye advise, sir?'

'Measure a hundred paces, keeping yonder pillar on a line with that clump of trees there, and then dig.'

'Ay, but Wilkins overheard the capt'n say that the money was buried at the foot of some trees,' said Forrest. 'A hundred paces ain't going to bring us near a tree.'

'I remember nothing about the foot of some trees,' I exclaimed.

'What do *you* recall?' the carpenter shouted to Wilkins.

'I thought I heerd something about the foot of trees,' answered the fellow, turning his pale, meaningless countenance upon Lush. 'But Mr. Dugdale 'll know best, of course.'

'If the money be here at all,' said I, 'you may take it as lying hidden somewhere in this space,' and with pointing finger I indicated an oblong surface one end of which went a little beyond the fourth group of trees, whilst I defined the other as starting from about a hundred paces away from the edge of the beach where the boat was.

Ten minutes were now expended in heated discussion. Where should they begin? One or two were for leaving it to me and carrying out my suggestions; others were for measuring two hundred paces and starting there; whilst others were for digging at the roots of the clumps of trees, taking them one after another.

'See here, lads,' cried the carpenter; 'we han't had anything to eat yet. Better tarn to and get some dinner and grog. By that time we shall ha' settled what to do and be the fitter to go to work,'

This was a proposal which all hands found perfectly agreeable. They flung down the implements they held, and in a very short time were seated about the grass, sheath-knives in hand, making a hearty meal off salt beef and biscuit and cheese, and tossing down pannikins of rum-and-water. They invited me to join them, and treated me with all the respect I could desire. Again and again, whilst we thus sat, I would direct looks at the barque as she lay as it might seem almost within musket-shot of us. The figure of a man paced the forecastle; but Miss Temple was not to be seen. Once the carpenter, catching me looking, exclaimed with a sort of enthusiasm in his voice: 'Well, the little hooker *is* a beauty and no mistake. What a slaver she'd make!' Commendation probably could not go higher in such a man. A beauty, indeed, she looked; the reflection of her white sides floated under her like a wavering sheet of silver; her canvas hanging in festoons showed with the milk-white softness of streaks of clouds against the blue sky past her; her rigging had the exquisite minuteness of hair. Would to God, I thought to myself with a sudden heavy sinking of my heart, that I were on board of her alone with Miss Temple, ay, with no other hands than mine to work the ship! I should find the strength of half-a-dozen seamen in me for her sake. Poor girl! and there arose before me a vision of the Indiaman—a recollection of the proud Miss Temple scarcely enduring to send a glance my way—— But this was a reverie that must be speedily disturbed by the company I was in.

They had hoarsely debated until they had come to an agreement, and, having concluded their meal, each man lighted his inch of sooty clay, picked up his shovel or his crow, or whatever else had been brought off from the barque, and marched to the nearest of the clump of trees, at the foot of which they fell to digging. Every man was in motion; they laboured with incredible activity, and with such faces of rapturous expectation as again and again forced a smile from me, depressed, anxious, miserable as I was. With my hands clasped behind me, I paced to and fro, watching and waiting. Now that the island had proved an absolute fact, I could no longer feel certain that the gold was a madman's fancy. Nay, I was now indeed imagining that it was all true, and that Braine had fallen crazy through possession of his incommunicable secret acting upon a mind congenitally tinctured with insanity, and irremediably weakened yet by the horrible sufferings he had undergone before he was cast away upon this spot. Yet never did I glance at the barque without a prayer trembling from my heart to my lips that the wretches might not find the gold. An old scheme, that this unexpected lighting upon the island had quickened and given shape to, was fast maturing in my mind, even while I paced that stretch of grass; but the discovery of the money would render it abortive.

I watched the seamen with an interest as keen as their own, but with hopes diametrically opposite. The soil was dry, stubborn,

perhaps through the intermingling of coral-grit and the coarse fibres of its herbage. Yet there were many of them, and every man worked with desperate energy, and presently they had dug up a good space to some little depth. I awaited with a beating heart the exultant shout which I might be sure the first man who turned up one of the yellow pieces would raise. They continued to toil in silence. Presently the carpenter, resting his chest upon his shovel, with the sweat falling in rain from his crimson face, bawled out to me: 'How fur down, d'ye think, we ought to keep on a-digging?'

'I would give up at two feet,' said I. 'Captain Braine and his friend would not find strength to go much beyond two feet.'

One of the fellows plumbed with his crow, and, bringing it out, with his thumb at the height of the level, cried: 'It's more'n two feet already.'

They dug a little longer, nevertheless; then a few curses ran among them, and the carpenter, with a note of irritation in his voice, roared out: 'No good going on here. Try this clump.' He walked over to it and drove his shovel into the soil. The men gathered about him, and in a thrice were all in motion again.

This was a severity of soil that I knew must force them to break off presently. Although I could not distinctly recollect the bearings of the treasure as given by Captain Braine, I felt persuaded that he had named the base of the group of trees which the fellows had just quitted as the hiding-place of the money. If it were not there, then I might feel perfectly satisfied it was nowhere else, and hope began to dawn in me afresh. Their labour at the base of the second clump resulted in nothing. They exposed a wide space, and went deep, but to no purpose. The time had passed rapidly; I looked at my watch, and was astonished to find it hard upon five o'clock.

All this while the sky had remained cloudless, and there was no hint visible in any part of its countenance of a change in this softness and tranquillity of weather. The light off-shore draught, however, had shifted into the west, and at this hour there was a cool and pleasant breeze, that brushed the breast of the sea into a surface of twinkling ripples. The water of the lagoon trembled to it as it breathed laterally athwart its face, and already the coral beach of this graceful wide-mouthed inlet bore on the lee-side its stress of tiny breakers.

The sailors by this time were pretty well exhausted. The expressions their faces wore, so far as they might be determinable amid the purple, and perspiration, and hair of their dripping and fire-hot visages, showed them full of irritability and disappointment. The carpenter addressed them; I did not catch what he said, but as they came in a body towards the part of the beach where I had been pacing or sitting whilst they worked, I could hear them swearing and cursing, whilst they grumbled and growled out their surmises as to where the money was hidden, their eyes

roving over the soil as they talked. Lush's face was hard with temper.

'We're ageing to send off some men to furl the lighter canvas,' said he. 'Ha'n't got much opinion of this soil as holding ground, and she'll drag with that weight of canvas loose, and blow away out of soundings, if we don't see to it.'

'A very proper precaution,' said I coolly. 'You don't mean to give up digging yet, I suppose?'

'Give up?' he cried with his coarse sarcastic air, and frowning upon me out of the rage my inquiry excited. 'No; not if we has to dig the whole island up, as I told ye.'

'Very well. I'll go aboard with the men in the boat. The money, if it is hidden at all, will be hereabouts,' said I, with a wave of my arm, 'and I can be of no further use to you.'

'No, no; you'll stop along with us, if you please,' said the fellow. 'Your recollection of the number of paces may come back to ye, and we can't do without you.'

I sent a look from him into the faces of the fellows who stood listening near us, and without another word folded my arms, and with a spin of my heel started off on a walk to and fro.

CHAPTER XL

I ESCAPE

If I had witnessed the idleness of protest and remonstrance and appeal on board the barque, I must have held entreaty to be tenfold more useless in the face of the mortification of the carpenter and his crew, increased as their temper was by the irritation and the fatigue of hard and useless work. I might at once be sure that they had no intention of suffering me to leave the island until they quitted it themselves for good. There would be also distrust; the fear that I might contrive to run away with the ship. Yet I had still to find out what they meant to do: what their plans were for the night. I knew what I wanted, and I remember what I prayed for as I tramped solitarily backwards and forwards on the edge of the herbage where it came thin to the beach.

Seven men entered the longboat and shoved off. The carpenter remained; with him was the sailor named Woodward. They flung themselves down upon the ground with an air of exhaustion, and so lay smoking their pipes. After awhile, the carpenter called to me. I approached him leisurely. He asked me if I remembered the number of paces from the beach, and eyed me so surlily as he put the inquiry that I began to think he suspected I could tell if I chose.

'If Wilkins can't remember,' I exclaimed, 'why should I be able to do so—I, whose opinion of this business you well know?

I do not recollect the number of paces. I wish I did, for I am more anxious than ever you can be that you should come at this gold, that we may sail away, and end the most cursed adventure that ever a man was forced into.'

The heat and the evident sincerity with which I spoke these words slightly subdued him, and his ugly face relaxed its threatening look. Finding him silent I said : 'What do you mean to do?'

'Stop here all night,' he answered shortly. 'Stop here, I've told ye, till we've found the money.'

'You will leave some men aboard the ship to look after her?'

'Two'll be quite enough,' he answered. 'How much looking after do she want in weather of this pattern? If we don't meet with the gold afore dark—and there'll be no chance of *that*, I allow—we must all be at hand to tarn to at daybreak.'

I asked no further questions ; and the fellow sank into silence, both he and the other sucking at their pipes, whilst they seemed to hunt with their eyes over the ground as they lay with their heads propped on their elbows.

I saw Miss Temple on the poop watching the approaching boat. Very well could I imagine the feeling which would possess her when she perceived that I was not among the occupants of the little craft! The boat clumsily drove alongside, and the men sprang on board over a short rope gangway ladder that had been dropped. They went to work at once, as though in a hurry to get the furling job over, that they might return ; and with a swiftness that was surprising in fellows almost exhausted by previous labour, they furled the mainsail, foresail, and lighter canvas, leaving the topsails hanging, and the spanker loosely brailed in to the mast. This done, they descended, and came to a pause at the gangway, as though giving what news they had to the two seamen that had been left behind. They then entered the boat afresh and leisurely made for the island. As they jumped on to the beach, I noticed that the man Simpson had taken the place of Forrest, who had been left to keep a lookout with Wetherly. I felt instantly very uneasy on observing this. There was no other man of all the crew whom I would not sooner have wished to be Wetherly's associate than that impudent, mutinous, bold-faced young seamen. To think of Miss Temple alone with those two men! one to be trusted, as I hoped and believed ; but the other as insolent and defiant a rascal as could be imagined of any forecastle blackguardly hand! I gazed eagerly at the barque, and was glad to find that the girl had gone below. I earnestly prayed that she would have the sense to keep in hiding. There was the long night before her, and Wetherly might sleep.

Never since the hour of our losing sight of the Indiaman had I felt half so worried, half so distracted with fears and forebodings. I withdrew to a distance from that part of the beach where I had been walking, that the workings of my mind might not be seen in my face ; and thankful was I afterwards, when I had somewhat

cooled down, that the carpenter did not offer to approach or speak to me; for such was the passion my anxiety for Miss Temple had raised, that I believe a single syllable of rudeness would have caused me to fall upon him—with what result it would be useless here to imagine.

There was about an hour and a half of daylight remaining. When the sailors had secured their boat, they went to supper. In lieu of tea they drank rum-and-water, and this pretty plentifully.

'Won't ye jine us, Mr. Dugdale?' called out the carpenter. 'No call to eat along with us if you object to our company. Ye can have your food separate; but you'll be wanting to eat anyhow.'

'He must be a poor sailor who is not good enough company for me,' I exclaimed, having by this time mastered myself; and forthwith I took my seat amongst them and fell to upon a piece of salt beef, whilst I got a stronger beat for my pulse out of the pannikin of grog that I drained.

The men's talk was all about the gold. 'If it ain't under them trees,' said one of them, 'it'll ha' to come to doing what the gent told us; starting at a hundred paces from the wash of the water there and digging in a line till we strikes it.'

'What'll them as hid it have wrapped it up in?' exclaimed another.

'Canvas,' answered the carpenter shortly.

'Which 'll have rotted by this time, I allow, and the money 'll be lying loose,' said a sailor.

'Who'll get the first chink of it?' cried Wilkins.

Exclamations of this sort I observed worked a general sense of elation in them; and the rum helping their spirits, they began to crack jokes, and their laughter was loud and frequent. The scene, to any one who could have viewed it without distress, must have been thought admirable for its character of soft romantic beauty. The western atmosphere was brimful of the reddening light of the descending sun; under it, the smooth ocean lay in dark gold that came sifting out into a cool azure, which then ran with an ever-deepening tint of blue into the clear liquid distance. The trembling of the sea to the breeze put a weak coming and going of light and shadow into these dyes, and freshened the western light upon the surface into a very glorious scintillation. The barque floated like a shape of marble in the cerulean water that lay betwixt the reflection of the sun and the darker tints of the east. Her rigging resembled wires of gold, her masthead vane lay like a little flame against the sky; her white shadow fluctuated in dissolving quicksilver under her, and as she slightly leaned with the delicate heave of that wide Pacific breast, stars of crimson flashed off her deck, and her bright lower masts showed as though they were on fire. The water in the lagoon floated in a tender blue to the coral beach on which it rippled. There was a subtle aroma as of sweet and secret inland vegetation upon the atmosphere. The long grass stirred, and the silken brushing of the

leaves of the trees against one another produced the most refreshing sound that could be imagined to ears which for months had received no pleasanter noises than the straining of timbers, the flapping of sails, and the sobbing and washing of the ocean surge. There was nothing in the wildness and rugged looks of the fiery-faced recumbent seamen to impair the tenderness of this picture. On the contrary, their roughness seemed to accentuate its gentle beauty, as the silence of a calm midnight at sea may be heightened by some gruff human voice speaking at a distance, or by some rude sound that assists the hearing as a contrast.

The carpenter looked towards the sun.

'Don't let's waste no more time,' he cried; 'let's attack that third clump there afore it falls dark.'

They sprang to their feet, seized their several tools, and in a few moments were hard at it, digging, boring, but in silence, for their efforts were too heavy for talk or for laughter. The sun went down whilst they were still toiling. They had discovered nothing, and the first to give up was the carpenter. He sent his shovel flying through the air with a loud curse.

'I'm done for to-night,' he roared. 'Where did them scow-bankers hide it? It'll have to be as Mr. Dugdale says. 'Morrow marning we'll start at a hundred paces from the beach. We're not here to miss it, and we'll have it if we rip the guts of this island out of her forty fathom deep!'

He was furious with temper and exhaustion, and stepping to a kettle that was full of rum and water, he half-filled a hook-pot and swallowed the contents to the dregs, afterwards pitching the vessel from him with an air of loathing and passion. The men, throwing their implements into a heap, came slowly to where the rum and provisions were, cursing very freely indeed, some of them groaning with weariness, smearing the sweat off their foreheads along their naked arms, and stretching their clenched fists above their heads in postures of yawning. Every man of them took a long drink, and then they slowly fell to filling their pipes whilst they continued to heap curses upon Captain Braine and his companion for not having buried the money in a place where it might be easily got at.

My heart was now beating quickly with anxiety. What was the next step they meant to take? Would the carpenter change his mind and carry all hands of us aboard? I observed him light his pipe, and take a look around with as evil an expression on his face as ever I had witnessed in it. He then trudged with a deep sea-roll in his walk down to the tree to which the boat was attached, and having carefully examined the knot, as though to make sure that the line was securely fastened, he stood gazing awhile at the little craft, as though considering, afterwards sending his eyes in another rolling stare round the horizon as far as it lay visible. I watched him furtively, but with consuming anxiety.

'Tell ye what, mates,' he suddenly sung out, rounding upon

the men and approaching them, 'there's nothen to hurt in this weather, and the barque's going to lie as quiet as if she was laid up. We'll just stop where we are; but a lookout 'll ha' to be kept, and the boat must be watched. Better settle the order at once. The lookout will sit in the boat, case'—he added with a sarcastic leer in my direction—'there might be savages about unbeknown to us with a settlement aback of that hill amidships there. What d'ye say, Mr. Dugdale?'

'I have no longer command,' I answered; 'it is for you to arrange as you will. Why you desire to keep me here, I cannot imagine. Why not put me aboard, that the young lady may have the comfort of my presence?'

'She don't want no comfort,' he answered coarsely; 'she's all right. The number of paces the capt'n talked of may come to ye by daybreak, and we're all at hand to tarn to.'

I made no answer.

The night came down dark and clear, with a noise of rippling waters in the quiet steady wind. The barque faded into a phantasm, and inland it was all black as ink, with the stars which rimmed the outline of the central rise winking there like sentinel beacons burning upon some giant mountain leagues distant. But where the boat lay the space of coral grit showed pallid, of the hue of ordinary soil bathed in moonlight, and the figure of the little fabric, with her nose pointing at the tree to which the rope that secured her was fastened, blended shadowily with the darkling surface of the water of the lagoon, over whose tiny ripples the clear reflection of the larger stars were riding.

The men roamed about in twos and threes, but never very far. I believed I could trace an uneasiness in their behaviour, as though they had consented to sleep out of the ship in obedience only to the carpenter's wishes, and were now reconsidering their acquiescence with some indecision of mind. I earnestly hoped that this might not prove so, and watched and listened to them with my heart full of wretchedness. The carpenter was seated with another man, and conversed with him in low notes, which trembled to my ears like the subdued growling of a dog. I strolled away to a distance, but was neither followed nor called to.

The time passed very slowly. The men grew weary of moving about, though for some while the mere sensation of the hard soil was a delight to them, now that the air was deliciously cool and they had no work to do and could roam at will. They came in a body together and seated themselves round about the carpenter and his companions, drinking by the starlight, with the frequent glare of the lighting of pipes throwing out the adjacent faces, till it was like looking into a camera obscura. They talked much, but my attentive ear detected a drowsy note stealing into the sound of grumbling that stood for their conversation.

It was drawing on to the half-hour past ten when I stepped leisurely up to the huddle of shadows, and looking over them as

they lay in all sorts of postures, I exclaimed: 'Which is the carpenter?'

'Here he is,' answered the voice of Lush.

'Are the men going to make a bedroom of this spot?' said I.

'Ay,' he answered. 'Where else? Ye han't surely come across a hotel in your lonely rambles?'

These words he pronounced without intending offence, though such was the coarseness of the ruffian that he could say little which was not offensive. One or two of the fellows laughed.

'I shall look out for comfortable quarters for myself,' said I. 'I have no fancy for lying amidst all this high grass. There may be snakes about.'

'No, no!' exclaimed one of the men; 'there's no snakes here, sir. I've kept a bright lookout. There's nothen to be afeerd of.'

'Ye'll find the grass a soft bed,' exclaimed the carpenter.

'Thank you,' I answered; 'but since I am detained here against my will, allow me at least to choose my own mattress. Should you want me, you'll find me about eighty paces yonder, where there's some clean sand betwixt the bushes. I pointed to a spot a little distance past the curve of the lagoon.

'It don't signify to us where ye sleep, sir,' exclaimed Lush; 'we shan't be wanting ye till the morning, by which time I hope you'll have recollected the distance Capt'n Braine named. If you should feel a-dry in the night ye'll find a kettle-full of rum-and-water alongside yon breaker that's standing upright.'

'Thanks,' said I; 'good-night.'

There was a rumbling sleepy answer of 'good-night' from amongst them.

The spot I had chosen gave me a clear view of the lagoon, and by consequence of the boat. There was no grass here, and the bushes were small and stunted, as though starved by the sandy character of the soil. Yet they furnished a dark surface, amid which I could crawl on my hands and knees without risk of being seen from the place occupied by the men. I sat down to wait and watch. Over the tops of the bushes alongside of me I could just distinguish the figures of the sailors when one or another of them rose apparently to obtain a drink from the kettle. After I had been seated some twenty minutes or so, I spied one of them walking towards the boat. His dark shape showed with tolerable distinctness when he emerged from the comparative obscurity of the herbage into the dull gleam of the stretch of coral foreshore. He entered the boat, and then I lost sight of him, for the water past him lay in a trembling sheet of gloom, and his outline was absorbed in it. From time to time I could hear the voices of the seamen conversing; but shortly after eleven all was silent amongst them, and then the indescribable hush of the great ocean night settled down upon the lonely rock.

There was nothing in the stirring of the bushes to the wind, in the dim and delicate seething in the lagoon, in the hollower note

of surf lightly tumbling at the back of the island, to vex this vast oppressive stillness. I thanked God that there was no moon; yet could have earnestly prayed for more wind and for a few clouds to obscure something of the small fine spangling of the atmosphere by the stars. I could see no light upon the barque; she lay in a little heap of faintness, what with her white sides and hanging white topsails, out in the gloom.

Presently, when I had supposed that all hands saving the fellow in the boat were sleeping, I saw a figure slowly coming my way. I gathered by his posture, as I dimly discerned it, that he was staring among the bushes as he advanced. He slightly lurched as he stepped, and it was not until he was within twenty feet of me that I perceived he was the carpenter. I pillowed my head on my arm, drew my feet up, and feigned to be in a sound slumber. He arrived abreast of me, stood looking a little, and then went slowly back to the others.

The scheme I had made up my mind to adventure was one of extraordinary peril. Yet I was quite certain that the dreadful risk would provide me with my last, indeed my only chance. I was now immovably convinced that though Captain Braine's story of the existence of the island was a fact, his assurance of a large fortune in hidden gold was a madman's fancy. The men would be finding this out; what they would then do, I could not conjecture; but the menace involved in their lawlessness, their rage of disappointment, their determination (certain to follow) to find their account in the barque and her cargo at all costs, was so heavy, so fraught with deadly peril to Miss Temple and myself, that I was resolved that night to make one prodigious dash for liberty, leaving the rest to fate. Once during that day it had occurred to me to make a rush for the boat and shove off, leaving the men without any means of pursuing me; but a little consideration showed me that the risks of such an attempt were all too fearfully against me. If I valued my life for my own as well as for the girl's sake, I must not fail; and yet failure seemed almost certain. Before I could have liberated the line that secured the boat, sprung into her, lifted one of her heavy oars to shove her off with, the men, who had always been working within a hundred and fifty yards of the beach, would have been upon me. Or supposing I had managed to slide the boat a few fathoms away before they arrived, half of them would have been probably able to swim faster than I could scull the clumsy fabric, whilst my erect figure must have supplied an easy mark for the stones which those remaining on shore would have hurled at me. No! I had mused upon and then utterly dismissed that scheme, coming back to my first resolution, which I now lay waiting for the right moment to execute.

At half-past twelve by my watch, which the starlight enabled me to read, the man who had first entered the boat came out of it, and was replaced by another, whose figure I followed with my sight as he passed across the beach and disappeared in the little

structure. For another hour I continued to watch, to wait, to hearken with every sense in me strained to its acutest limit; during which time the island continued sunk in the profoundest stillness of this midnight, saving always the noise of the rippling of waters and of the breezy stirring of the bushes. Then with a few words of appeal to God for courage and support, I started to crawl round past the spot where the men were sleeping, that I might arrive at the beach under cover of the tall grass, which would hinder them from observing my form as I approached the tree to which the boat's line was secured.

The soil ran in a sandy trail through the bushes hereabouts, and I got along pretty nimbly, crawling noiselessly, feeling ready to burst at times, owing to the almost unconscious holding of my breath, forced upon me by my apprehension lest I should be observed or overheard. Presently, coming to the trees at whose base the men had dug, I stood up, not fearing detection here, and very rapidly gained the growth of bushes which darkened a space of land to the north, betwixt the place where the men lay and the broad shelf of white beach where, as the fellows had supposed, the Spanish brigantine had driven ashore. I now dropped on my knees and hands again, and in this posture skirted the high herbage that grew down to where the coral grit provided no soil for such vegetation, until I came to the tree, close up against which I rose, that my shape might appear as a part of the trunk. Then, with an eager, trembling hand, I cast the line adrift, and sinking again on my knees and hands, crawled upon the dark surface of the verdure to where it went nearest to the northern horn of the lagoon, where, still crouching, I remained for a little space watching.

In a few minutes the liberated boat, feeling the action of the wind, slowly floated off.

At every instant I was prepared to hear a shout from the shore or from the fellow who was supposed to be at watch in the boat.

Yet it soon grew plain that my utmost hopes were to be confirmed by the heavy rum-influenced slumber that had overtaken the watchman, and that lay in lead upon the closed lids of the wearied sailors upon the grass. My heart was loud in my ears as I crouched watching. Presently the boat had slipped to some considerable distance from the shore, and was sliding seawards out to the wide yawn of the lagoon broadside to the ripples and the breeze. Then, pulling off my coat and waistcoat, and shoes and smallclothes, I crawled down on to the clear gleam of the beach, waded into the water, and struck out for the barque.

I was a fairly good swimmer; of old the exercise had been one of delight to me. The water was cool, but not chilling; I seemed to find a buoyancy in me, too, as from excess of brine in the dark surface, through which I gently pushed at first, lest I should raise a light of phosphorescence about me. At intervals I would pause, faintly moving my arms that I might keep myself afloat, and hearkening in a very agony of expectation. But all continued

silent ashore. Now and again I caught sight of the boat as she went drifting seawards; but the shadow of the night lay thick upon the breast of the sea, and the small structure was sunk in it in a blending that eluded the gaze.

When I considered I had swum far enough to render any such sea-glow as my movements would kindle about me invisible from the island, I put my whole strength into my arms and legs and swam with a vigour that speedily began to tell. The dim heap of faintness which the barque had made grew definable with the stealing out of its proportions. The outline of the hull shaped itself; then I could see the clear line of the yards and spars ruling the starry sky with the vaporous-like folds of the topsails hanging. I felt no fatigue, no cold; the silence on the land filled me with a spirit of exultation, and the animation of that emotion acted upon me like a cordial of enduring virtue. Gradually and surely I neared the barque; the swim was but a short one in reality, and I needed no rest, though rest I could easily have obtained by floating on my back for a while. Within twenty minutes from my first cautious taking of the water, my hand was upon the lowest rung of the rope gangway ladder that lay over the side.

I held by it a little, to take breath and to listen. I had seen no figures on the vessel as I approached: but I knew that Forrest was on board, that the very piratical cast of the rogue's character would render him alert and perceptive; that the moment he spied me he would guess a stratagem, and be upon me; and that it was my business to be before him, or to be prepared for his first spring, armed, as I knew him to be, with the sailor's invariable weapon, the sheath-knife.

CHAPTER XLI

WE SAIL AWAY

It did not take me long to recover my breath. The swim had, indeed, comparatively speaking, been a short one; there was no tide that I had been in any degree sensible of; and I had lost nothing but breath, thanks to my eagerness, to the riotous tumult of spirits that had nerved my limbs with steel and rendered me unconscious of fatigue. I crawled up the ladder and peered over the rail. The gloom lay heavy upon the quarter-deck and waist, and objects were hard to distinguish. All was motionless, however, there and on the forecastle, but I could now discern two figures walking on the poop on the port side. The spanker-boom and mizzen-mast and the several fittings of skylight and companion, and so on, had concealed them from my observation whilst I swam, approaching the ship as I had on the starboard side. Their shapes showed tolerably clear against the stars that sparkled over the rail and betwixt the squares of the rigging, and I stood staring with no more of me showing over the line of bulwarks than my head till

they had come to the rail that protected the break of the poop, and I then made out that one of them was Miss Temple.

This convinced me that the other must be Wetherly, for it was not to be imagined that the girl would seek refuge from even a more frightful loneliness than hers was in the society of young Forrest.

At that instant I heard a long wild halloa dimly coming through the steady breeze from the shore. The cry was followed by another and yet another, and then it seemed to me that it was re-echoed from off the water some distance ahead of us. I sprang in a bound on to the deck, and in the breath had armed myself with an iron belaying-pin; and now if that man were Forrest with whom Miss Temple was, I was ready for him! In a moment I had gained the poop. The cries ashore had brought the pair to a dead halt, and they stood listening. Now that I was on the poop I perceived by the build of the figure of the man that it was Wetherly, and rushed up to him. The girl recoiled with a loud shriek on seeing me, as well she might; for having partially undressed myself, I was clothed from top to toe in white; I was dripping wet besides, which moulded my attire to my figure and limbs as though I had been cast in plaster of Paris, and my sudden apparition was as if I had shaped myself out of the air.

'Is that you, Wetherly?' I cried.

'Great God, mum, it's Mr. Dugdale!' he roared.

The girl uttered another shriek, came in a bound to me and flung her arms round my neck.

Now the halloaing ashore was incessant, and the wild cries sounding through the wind were as though the island had been suddenly invaded by an army of frenzied cannibals.

'My dearest!' I cried, letting forth my heart in that moment of being clasped and clung to by her whom I had long loved and was risking my life to save, 'it is I indeed! But release me now, my darling girl. We must get the barque under weigh instantly. Wetherly, where is Forrest?'

'Dead, sir.'

'*Dead!*' I cried.

'Shot dead by Miss Temple's hand, sir,' he exclaimed.

The girl let fall her arms from my neck, essayed to speak, struggled a little with her breath, and fell against me in a dead swoon.

'Your coat, Wetherly,' I shouted; 'off with it, man, and make a pillow for the lady's head. Quick! If the longboat sculls ashore and the crew enter her before we can slip, we are both of us dead men.'

He instantly pulled off his jacket; and tenderly, but swiftly, I laid the girl down, first freeing the collar of her dress and no more, for there was time for no more.

'Jump for the cabin lamp, Wetherly,' I cried; 'don't stop to ask any questions. We must knock out a shackle, and let the chain go overboard. That is what is now to be done.'

He rushed off the poop, I in his wake. The lamp was dimly burning, but it enabled us to find what we wanted in the carpenter's chest: and whilst I held the light to a shackle that was just forward of the windlass barrel, he let drive, and the cable went with a roar through the iron hawse-pipe.

'We must now get the topsail on her and blow away,' I cried.

The conviction that the men would view him as my confederate and have his life if they got aboard, put an incredible activity into his limbs, which were habitually slow of motion. My having swum to the ship made his sailorly mind comprehend without a syllable of explanation from me how I had contrived the matter. We fled to where the topsail clewlines were belayed, and let them go, and then hand over hand dragged home the sheets, which, being of chain, travelled through the sheave-holes very readily. This done, I sped as fast as my feet would carry me to the poop, and finding the helm amidships, waited to see how the wind sat with regard to the position of the ship, meanwhile bawling at the top of my lungs to Wetherly to let go the maintopsail clewlines and bring the clews home as far as his strength would enable him.

The light breeze was off the starboard quarter. I at once starboarded the helm, and, to my infinite delight, found the barque responsive to the turn of the spokes, proving that, snail-like as might be her progress, she at least had steerage way upon her. This brought the land upon the starboard beam. I then steadied the helm, quite sure that the craft would steer herself for a few minutes.

As I ran forward I witnessed Miss Temple in the act of sitting upright. I sprang to her side and lifted her to her feet, and held her for perhaps a minute with her face upon my shoulder until she should have recovered herself.

'Sit on this skylight,' I exclaimed, 'until you feel equal to assisting us, and then come to our help, for we greatly need you.'

She understood me, but was too weak and dazed as yet to be of use. The shouts from the shore were incessant. The men had heard the chain cable as it rattled through the hawse-pipe, and I judged they were yelling to the ship, as though hailing Forrest; but they were too far distant for their syllables to reach us. I spent a breathless moment in sweeping the sea towards the mouth of the lagoon, and on a sudden saw the boat like a drop of ink on the star-touched shadow of the water; but I heard no sounds of her being sculled—which would be the fellow's only chance of getting ashore—nor could I catch the least sign of his figure.

My immediate business now was to get the foretopsail mast-headed as best we could. There was a little winch just abaft the main-mast. Shouting out my intentions to Wetherly, I bent on the first length of rope I met with to the hauling part of the topsail halliards and brought it to the winch, where I took some turns with it. As I did this, Miss Temple descended the poop ladder.

'Have you strength to hold on to this rope?' I cried to her.

'Oh, yes,' she answered.

I put it into her hand, bidding her to do no more than keep a light strain upon it, that it might not slip; and in a moment the little winch was rattling with the chirruping of its pawls going straight up in the air like an endless cocking of muskets to Wetherly's and my vigorous arms.

By this means we contrived to hoist the foretopsail, though not, as will be supposed, to a 'taut leech,' as sailors call it. Yet the cloths showed a wide surface to the wind, and already the nimble frame of the little barque, yielding to the summer pressure aloft, was sliding along very nearly as fast as the men could have urged the heavy longboat through the water, supposing them to have recovered her and to be in pursuit. Whilst Wetherly manœuvred with the maintopsail halliards in readiness for hoisting the yard, I once again hurried aft to the wheel, to make sure of the course of the barque. She was drifting dead before the small breeze with her head at about east-by-north, and already had brought the island veering upon the quarter, lying down there in a lump of blackness in the starlit gloom, with just the gleam of the bit of northern coral sea-board glancing off the dusk of the shelving reef. From time to time I could hear the fellows shouting, but their voices were now sounding thin, weak, and remote. The star-flakes in the black water astern trembled to the mild passage of the wind; and sparks of the sea-fire, like golden seed, churned up in our wake mingled with those delicate crystal reflections. With an eager passionate prayer upon my lip that this steady draught would hold, I regained the main-deck; and all being ready, Wetherly and I revolved the winch, Miss Temple holding on as before, and the yards slowly mounted till we could 'heave and pawl' no further.

'Now, Wetherly,' I shouted, 'jump aloft and loose that foresail. Pass your knife through the gaskets. Don't wait to cast them adrift.'

Then catching up the girl's hand, which I pressed to my lips before speaking, I asked her to accompany me to the wheel, that she might hold the helm steady and keep the barque straight before the wind.

'There is no time,' I exclaimed as I hastened aft with her, 'to utter more than the few syllables necessary to effect our escape. We must heap all the canvas we can manage to spread upon the ship. We must contrive to blow away out of sight of that island before the breeze fails, or the men will be giving chase in the longboat.'

She grasped the spokes in silence. The binnacle lamp was unlighted, and the card lay in gloom. I bade her take note of a star that stood like a jewel at the extreme end of the starboard mainyardarm, and swiftly directed her how to move the wheel, if that star swung from the end of the spar, so as to bring it back again to its place. I then sprang to the main-rigging, and climbed with the activity of one to whom the loss of a minute may mean life or death,

to the height of the topgallant yard, the sail of which I loosed, and then came hand over hand down to the deck by the stay. The barque was but a toy of a ship at the best, and after the pyramidal heights reared by the Indiaman, her tops and cross-trees looked but a leap from the deck. I had sheeted home the topgallant-sail before Wetherly had let fall the foresail. I summoned him to the halliards, and when the sail was set, we let go the fore clew garnets and hauled the sheet aft. Then we hoisted the foretopmast stay-sail and other light fore and aft sails; and in order to get as much weight out of the wind as there blew in it, we braced the yards somewhat forward, that the fore and aft canvas might draw. When this was done, I raced aft to the wheel and put it down.

No sooner did the little barque feel the air off her beam than she gently sloped her spars to it with a small spitting of froth at her cutwater, and in a few minutes she was gliding along like a yacht, reeling off a fair six knots with water smooth as ice to travel over, small as was the amount of canvas we had made shift to spread. But I could do no more. My strength had failed me, and I was incapable of further exertions. It was not the fatigue of the swim merely, nor my red-hot haste and maddened labours since I had boarded the barque; the frightful hours of expectation, of anticipation, of hopes and fears, and of waiting, that I had passed upon the accursed island since sundown were now heavily telling upon me.

'Hold the wheel, will you, Wetherly?' said I. 'I am pretty nearly spent. I must rest a bit. Thanks be to God, we are safe now, I believe;' and, so saying, I sunk wearily upon the stern gratings.

Miss Temple went hastily to the cabin, carrying with her the lamp with which Wetherly had kindled the mesh in the binnacle. In a few minutes she returned with a tumbler of brandy-and-water, which she put to my lips. I swallowed the contents greedily, for I was not only parched with thirst, but my nerves sorely needed the stimulant. I took her hand and brought her to sit by my side, and continued to caress her hand, scarcely equal for more just then than a few rapturous exclamations over our deliverance, the delight I felt in being with her again, the joy in believing that I should now be able to redeem my promise and restore her in safety to her mother. Her replies were mere murmurs. Indeed, her only emotions were overwhelming. I could hear her sobbing: then see her by the starlight smiling; but she kept her eyes fixed on my face; soaked as I still was to the skin with salt water, she leaned against me, as though she needed the assurance of actual contact to convince her that I was with her once more.

But by this time the island had melted into the scintillant dusk of the sky. Nothing showed but the liquid sweep of the indigo line of horizon. Another hour of such sailing as this would convey us out of all possibility of reach of the longboat, supposing the men should recover her; for she was without mast or sail; the

utmost exertion of the rowers could scarcely get more than three or three and a half miles an hour out of her; then again I had shifted the barque's course, and would shift it again presently.

'Tell me now about Forrest!' I exclaimed, breaking a silence of fatigue and emotion that had lasted some few minutes.

I felt the shudder that ran through my companion in the clasp of her hand.

'Did I understand that you shot him?'

'It is too dreadful to speak of,' she said in a low voice.

'It was like this, sir,' exclaimed Wetherly. 'Forrest and me had agreed to keep a four hours' lookout. He was to stand from eight to twelve. I lay down on the fo'c'sle, believing the lady safe below, where she'd been pretty nigh ever since you and the men went ashore. I was awoke by a noise that sounded to me like the report of a gun. It was then about six bells, sir. I thought I'd just walk aft to see if all was right with the lady. Audacious as I knew that there fellow Forrest to be, speaking of him as a fo'c'sle hand, and capable of any sort of hinsolence and mutiny and the likes of that, I had no fear of him whilst he was left alone to keep a lookout with the hentertainment of thinking about the money him and his mates was to dig up. Well, as I reached the quarter deck the lady came out of the cabin. The light was burning dim, just as you found it when you came aboard. She held a pistol in her hand, and she says to me quite coolly: "A man came into my cabin just now. I heard him trying the handle of my door, and I took up this pistol, and when he walked in, I said: 'Who are you? What do you want?' He answered; and I pointed my pistol at him and fired. I believe I have killed him. Will you go and see?" I thought she was walking in her sleep, so quiet she talked. I went to her cabin, and saw Forrest lying upon the deck. I turned him over, and he was stone dead; shot through the heart, I reckon. I dragged his body into your cabin, where it's a-lying now. The lady then asked to keep company with me on the poop; and so it was you found us a-walking together, sir.'

'Brave Louise!' I murmured, moved to the utterance of her Christian name, though this was the first time I had ever given it her, close and ceaseless as our association had been. Yet an instant's reluctance, regret, or bashfulness followed my pronunciation of it—even at such a moment as that!—to the memory that arose in me with the velocity of thought of the proud eyes, the haughty coldness of the lofty, disdainful, elegant Miss Temple of the *Countess Ida*.

But what she had done was a thing not to be referred to again now. I felt the piteousness of her distress, shame, and horror in her silence: by-and-by she would be able to speak of it collectedly, if there were need indeed to recur to it at all.

'No fear of the boat overhauling us now, I think, Wetherly?' I exclaimed.

'Lord, no, sir; without e'er a sail to spread either. That swim

of yourn was a bold venture, Mr. Dugdale. Ye must ha' managed the job in first-rate style. Wasn't no lookout kept?'

His questions led me into telling the story. Miss Temple listened eagerly, our hands remaining locked; again and again she broke into an exclamation with some cry of alarm, some ejaculation of sympathy. 'You called me brave just now,' she said; 'but how is your behaviour to be expressed?'

'D'ye think there's any chance of the men recovering that boat?' inquired Wetherly. 'The chaps told me when they came aboard to furl the canvas that there was nothen to eat or drink upon the island saving what they'd taken. If they should lose the boat, it must go hard with them, sir.'

'They will not lose their boat unless the fellow who was in charge of her lay dead drunk in her bottom; an improbability; for I saw him walk on steady legs to her. My one chance lay in his being asleep. Make your mind easy: he was awakened long ago by the yells of the men, and by this time the boat lies snug at the beach of the lagoon. But why should you have any feeling for the brutes? They would have cut your throat had they succeeded in boarding us. What happened when you were asleep should be indication enough for you of the character of the ruffians, a pretty good warrant of the sort of treatment we might have expected at their hands later on, gold or no gold.'

'Mr. Dugdale,' he answered, 'all I can say is I'm thankful to the Lord to be where I am. I shall be desperate glad, I shall, when this here woyage is over. I should only just like to see my way to getting enough out of it to set up for myself ashore, for this here's been a job as has properly sickened me of the sea, and so I don't mind telling ye, sir.'

'There'll be the salvage of this craft,' said I; 'you can have my share, and I'm sure Miss Temple will give you hers.'

'Oh, certainly,' she exclaimed.

'Then there'll be your own share,' I went on. 'We have to carry the ship in safety to a port first of all. If we can't pick up hands as we go along, we three will have to manage as best we can. I don't doubt we shall contrive it; and then you will easily see your way to a few hundreds.'

I saw him grin broadly by the mingled light of the binnacle and star-shine. It was proper to fill him with hope, and to present to his limited understanding something very definite to work upon. There had been nothing in his behaviour to render me much obliged to him. He had chosen neutral ground in this business, with a little inclination to the safer side: and though he had ventured upon several promises, I had never secretly regarded him as a man who would prove heroically useful at a pinch. However, he was absolutely essential to our safety now, and it was politic that I should seem grateful; though, to be sure, there was always the instinct of self-preservation to keep him straight; by which I mean that he was as eager to end this extraordinary ramble as I was.

He asked me several questions about the gold, and talked as if he believed that the men might yet meet with it; but my answers seemed to convince him after a little, and I saw him wagging his head whilst he exclaimed: 'It was at the foot of a clump of trees, I know; I clearly recollect the yarn as Wilkins gave it, and his memory couldn't have gone wrong, for he arrived fresh with it from the cabin. If they've dug at the roots of all the trees abreast of the beach, as you say, sir, and the money ain't there, then good-night! It's the hallucination I always said it was; and for my part give me two pound of honest salvage afore two hundred thousand pound of lunatic dreamings.'

The breeze seemed to freshen as we drew away. The barque was now heeling prettily, throwing the water in a white curl of sea off her weather bow, and her wake ran far into the liquid gloom astern, into which I would again and again send a glance, governed yet by an agitation of spirits and an animation of alarm which my judgment pronounced ridiculous. I cannot express the caressing character of Miss Temple's manner as she continued seated close beside me. The astonishment, the rapture, the wildly contending sensations and emotions which had possessed her were now giving way to a mood of happiness, of triumphant hope, that put an indescribable note of tender elation and grateful, joyous sweetness into her words. If I had yet to wonder whether she loved me, I might feel sure that my return to her, that my presence, filled her with emotions which came very near to the passion of love.

But I was wet through; and now that we were safe, the vessel gliding with swiftness through the clear shadow of the night, and my shipmate Louise, tranquil in the full realisation of our sudden and complete deliverance, I could find leisure to feel a little chilly. So, leaving her with a promise that I should shortly return, and telling Wetherly to keep the barque steady as she was going, I picked up the cabin lamp, that was still feebly burning upon the deck, and descended the companion steps. I paused to look around me upon the familiar interior in which Miss Temple and I had passed so many hours of distress and wretchedness with an exclamation of gratitude to God for his merciful preservation of us, and then went to my cabin to habit myself in such dry garments as I might find in Captain Braine's locker. I opened the door, but recoiled with an involuntary cry. I had forgotten Forrest! and there lay the dead body of the man right in front of me. Twice, now, had that little square of carpet been stained by human blood. I was horribly shocked by the spectacle of the corpse; but it was necessary that I should change my clothes, and I had to undergo the torture of being watched by those half-closed ghastly eyes, to which twenty expressions of life were imparted by the stirring of the dim flame in the lantern whilst I sought for and attired myself in dry apparel. This done, I made a brighter flame, and then held the light to the dead face, that I might be sure the villain had no life in him. No gibbeted body that had been swinging in chains

for a month could be deader. I entered the cuddy, hung up the lamp, and went on deck.

'Miss Temple,' I exclaimed, 'will you kindly hold the wheel for a few minutes?'

She rose and grasped the spokes. Wetherly understood me, and followed me below in silence.

'We must toss the body overboard,' said I; 'there can be no luck for the ship with such an object as that as a part of her freight, and Miss Temple must be helped to forget the horror of the night that's going.'

Between us we picked up the corpse, very quickly conveyed it through the companion hatch, went forward with it where the darkness lay heavy, and dropped it over the bulwarks.

'That's how they would have served you, sir,' said Wetherly.

'And you,' said I.

'Yes, my God, I know it!' he answered in a voice of agitation.

We returned to the wheel, which Wetherly took from Miss Temple, who seated herself with me just behind it on the gratings, and there we held a council. Our business must be to get to a port as soon as possible. Should we head away for the Islands of the Low Archipelago, bearing north-west with a chance of falling in with a vessel cruising amongst them who would lend us two or three men to help us in navigating the barque, or should we steer a due east course for Valparaiso, that lay about two thousand six hundred miles distant?

Our resolution was rapidly formed. The islands might yield us no help; there was also the risk of running ashore upon the hundred reefs of that then little known navigation; abundance of the natives of the groups were man-eaters, and we certainly had not delivered ourselves from the perils we ran through enforced association with the carpenter and his crew merely to ingloriously terminate our adventures by serving to appease the appetite of a little population of blacks.

No; it must be Valparaiso. There we should find a city with every species of convenience: a consul to advise and assist us; shops where Miss Temple could make all necessary purchases; a choice of large ships for the passage home. The ocean we were traversing was the Pacific, and the time of year in it summer; there was nothing greatly to alarm us then in the contemplation of the possibility of our having to work the barque to the South American coast without more help than the three of us could provide. It would be necessary to keep the vessel under easy canvas, that we might always be equal to the occasion of a sudden change of weather, and that, to be sure, would protract the run. But a few weeks more or less of old ocean would be as nothing to us now that we were masters of our lives and liberty, now that we should know every day was bringing us something nearer to our distant home, that all the horrors with which our future had

but a few hours before been crowded were gone. As we conversed, talking with exultation of our escape, arranging for keeping watches, planning about the cooking of the food, and concerting twenty other measures of a like sort, the day broke; the stars died out in the east; the pale green of dawn went lifting like a delicate smoke into the shadow of the zenith; the light broadened fast, and the sun soared into a flashing day of cloudless heaven, and of dark-blue ocean wrinkled by the breeze. With a telescope in my hand I sprang on to the grating and slowly circled the sea-line with the lenses. The water brimmed bare to the sky on all sides.

'We are alone,' said I, dismounting and taking Miss Temple by the hand whilst I looked fondly into her face. 'When we were on the wreck, it was our misery to hunt the ocean with our gaze and find ourselves alone; and now, though we are still at sea, loneliness is delightful—for it is escape, freedom, the promise of home.'

Her eyes filled with tears.

CHAPTER XLII

CONCLUSION

I HAVE kept you long at sea. With my escape in the barque from Captain Braine's island in company with my shipmate Louise, the story of my adventure—the narrative, indeed, of the romance of the wreck—virtually ends. Yet you will wish to see Miss Temple safely home; you will desire to know whether I married her or not; you will also want to hear the latest news of the people of the *Countess Ida*, to learn the fate of the Honourable Mr. Colledge, of the crew of the *Magicienne's* cutter, and of the carpenter Lush and his merry gold-hunting men. All may be told in the brief limits of a chapter.

For five days Wetherly and Miss Temple and myself navigated the barque without assistance. We managed it thus: the girl took her turn in steering the vessel, and after a very few trials steered with the expertness of a trained hand. I can see her now as she stands at the wheel: her fine figure clear cut against the soft Pacific blue over the stern; her dark and shining eyes bent upon the compass card, or lifting in the beauty of the shadow of their lashes to the white canvas; her hands of ivory delicacy grasping the spokes, and always a smile of sweetness and gladness and hope for me when our glances met. To think of the haughty, aristocratic Miss Louise Temple reduced to it! But she did a deal more than that: she helped us to pull and haul; she cooked for us, she kept a lookout, walking the weather-deck whilst Wetherly steered and I was resting. No complaint ever left her lips; she was gentle and

happy in all she did. The sea had dealt with her to some purpose; and she was now as sweet, tender, compliant, as she was before self-willed, insolent, and objectionable in all things but her beauty.

The struggle, indeed, would have been a desperate one for us but for the weather. The small but steady sailing breeze that had blown us away from the island continued with a shift of three points only in those five days, and a trifling increase one night, so that we had never occasion to start a sheet or let go a halliard; nothing more were we called upon to do with the gear than to slacken away the braces.

It was on the afternoon of the fifth day that we fell in with a Peruvian man-of-war brig. She backed her topsail and sent a boat. The young officer in command spoke French very fluently, and Miss Temple and I between us were able to make him understand our story. He returned to his ship to report what I had said, and presently came back with a couple of Irish seamen, to whose services to help us to carry the barque to Valparaiso we were, he said, very welcome. This I considered an extraordinary stroke of fortune, for in so slender a ship's company as we should still make it was of the utmost consequence that all orders given should be perfectly and instantly intelligible. The Peruvian brig was bound on a cruise amongst the islands, and I earnestly entreated the officer to request his commander to head first of all for the reef upon which I had left Lush and his men, that they might be taken off, if they had not recovered their boat.

Down to this point, the three of us in one fashion and another had managed so fairly well, that the acquisition of the two Irish seamen communicated to me a sense of being in command of a very tolerable ship's company. Miss Temple and I could now enjoy some little leisure apart from a routine that had been harassing with its vexations and incessant demands upon our vigilance. Night after night descended upon us in beauty; the warm wind blew moist with dew; the reflection of the rich and trembling stars quivered in cones of an icy gleam amid the ripples of the breeze-brushed sea; the curl of new moon shone in the west in the wake of the glowing sun to rise nightly fuller and more brilliant yet, till for awhile the barque sailed through an atmosphere that was brimful of the greenish glory of the unclouded planet. There was scarcely, indeed, a condition of this tender tropic passage to Valparaiso that was not favourable to sentiment. Yet my pride rendered it an obligation upon me that before I spoke my love I must make sure of the girl's own feelings towards me. I watched her with an impassioned eye; I listened to every word that fell from her lips with an ear eager to penetrate to the spirit of her meaning; a smile that seemed in the least degree ambiguous would keep me musing for a whole watch together. Then I would inquire whether I could in honour ask her to be my wife until my protection and care for her had ceased, and she stood to me in the position she had occupied when we had first met aboard the India-

man. But to this very fine question of conscience I would respond with the consideration that if I did not ask her now, I must continue in a distracting state of suspense and anxiety for many weeks, running, indeed, into months—that is to say, until we should reach home; that she might misconstrue my reserve, and attribute it to indifference; that to make her understand why I did not speak would involve the declaration that my honour was supposed to regard as objectionable.

But all this self-parleying simply signified that I was waiting to make sure of her answer before addressing her. In one quarter of an hour one fine night, with a high moon riding over the topsail yardarm and the breeze bringing an elfin-like sound of delicate singing out of the rigging, it was settled! A glance from her, a moment of speaking silence brought my love to my lips, and standing with her hand in mine in the shadow of a wing of sail curving past the main-rigging, with the brook-like voice of running waters rising, I asked her to be my wife.

There was hesitation without reluctance, a manner of mingled doubt and delight. I had won her heart; and her hand must follow; but her mother, her dearest mother! Her consent must be obtained; and from what she said in disjointed sentences, with earnest anxiety to say nothing that might give me pain, with a voice that trembled with emotions of gratitude and affection, I gathered that Lady Temple's matrimonial schemes for her daughter soared very considerably above the degree of a commoner.

'But, Louise, I have your love?'

'Yes, yes, yes! my love, my gratitude, and my admiration.'

'And you need but your mother's consent to marry me?'

'Yes, and she will consent. This long association—this astonishing adventure——'

'Ay, but there is no obligation of marriage in *that*. I have your love, and your mother will consent because you love me?'

She fixed her eyes on my face, and by the haze of moonlight floating off the sand-white planks into the shadow in which we stood, I saw such meaning in them that the sole sequel of my interpretation of it must be to put my lips to hers.

'My first kiss, Louise! My God! how little did I dream of this happiness when I used to look at you and almost hate you aboard the *Countess Ida!*'

But enough of this. It all happened so many years ago now, that I am astonished by my memory that enables me to put down even so much of this little passage of my experiences with Louise as I have written.

After days of delightful weather and prosperous winds, we came to an anchor at Valparaiso. I at once waited upon the British Consul, related my story, delivered over the ship, and was treated by him with the utmost courtesy, consideration, and hospitality. A large English vessel was sailing for Liverpool eight days after the date of our arrival. I inspected her, and promptly took

berths for myself and Miss Temple; and the rest of the time we spent in providing ourselves with the necessary outfit for another long voyage. The consul informed me that the deposition I made as to the *Lady Blanche* would suffice in respect of the legal manœuvring that would have to follow, and that I was at liberty to sail whenever I chose. I empowered him to hand over any salvage money that might come to me to Wetherly, whom I also requested to call upon me when he should arrive in England, that I might suitably reward him for the very honest discharge of his duties from the time of our leaving the island in the barque.

I will not pretend that our passage home was uneventful. Out of it might readily be spun another considerable narrative; but here I may but glance at it. The ship was named the *Greyhound*. She was a tall, black, soft-wood-built ship, of American birth, with a white figure-head, and fine lines of planking, and three lofty skysail poles, and an almost perpendicular bow, and she had, to use the old term, the sailing qualities of a witch. There went with her a number of passengers, Spanish and English, who, thanks, I suppose, to the gossip of the British consul and his wife and family, were perfectly informed of every article of our story, and in consequence made a very great deal of us—of Miss Temple in particular. But how great had been the change wrought in her character! No more supercilious airs, haughty looks, chilling glances of contemptuous surprise. Her sweetness and cordiality rendered her as completely a favourite as she had been before disliked and feared by her fellow-passengers of the Indiaman.

It took her a long while, however, to recur without exquisite distress to the man Forrest whom she had shot. But I was never weary of putting the matter before her in its just light; and at last she suffered me to persuade her that what she had done it had been her duty to do, that every law of God and man was at the back of such a deed to justify and even consecrate it, and that so far from suffering the recollection to render her wretched, she should proudly honour herself for the instant's coolness, courage, and presence of mind she had exhibited at sight of the scoundrel. Yet it was inevitably a memory to linger darkly with her for some time.

Our being incessantly together from the hour of our sailing down to the hour of our arrival strengthened her love for me, and her passion became a pure and unaffected sentiment. This I could have by no means sworn it was when I spoke my love to her in the Pacific. I was sure that she liked me, that she even had a warm affection for me, inspired by gratitude and by esteem for as much of my character as she could understand in my behaviour to her. But I could not satisfy myself that she loved me, or that, subject to her mother's approval, she would have consented to marry me, but for our extraordinary experiences, that had coupled us together in an intimacy which most people might consider matrimony must confirm for her sake if not for mine.

But if that had ever been her mood—she never would own it—it ripened during this voyage into a love that the most wretchedly sensitive heart could not have mistaken. And now it remained to be seen what reception Lady Temple would accord me. She would be all gratitude, of course; she would be transported with the sight and safety of her daughter; but ambition might presently dominate all effusion of thankfulness, and she would quite fail to see any particular obligation on her daughter's part to marry merely because we had been shipmates together in a series of incredible adventures.

But all conjecture was abruptly ended on our arrival by the news of Lady Temple's death. A stroke of paralysis had carried her off. The attack was charged to her fretting for her daughter, of whose abandonment upon the wreck she had received the news from no less a person than the Honourable Mr. Colledge. Let me briefly describe how this had come about.

When the cutter containing Mr. Colledge and the men of the *Magicienne* had lost sight of the wreck in the sudden vapour that had boiled down over it, the fellows, having lost their lieutenant and being without a head, hurriedly agreed to pull dead away before the wind in the direction of the Indiaman, not doubting that she would be lying hove-to, and that they must strike her situation near enough to disclose the huge loom of her amidst the fog. They missed her, and then, not knowing what else to do, they lashed their oars into a bundle and rode to it. It was hard upon sunset when a great shadow came surging up out of the fog close aboard of them. It was the corvette under reefed topsails. The cutter was within an ace of being run down. Her crew roared at the top of their pipes, and they were heard; but a few moments later the *Magicienne* had melted out again upon the flying thickness. The boat, however, had been seen, and her bearings accurately taken; and twenty minutes later, the corvette again came surging to the spot where the cutter lay. Scores of eyes gazed over the ship-of-war's head and bulwarks in a thirsty, piercing lookout. The end of a line was flung, the boat dragged alongside, and in a few minutes all were safe on board. Colledge related the story of the adventure to his cousin—how the lieutenant had fallen overboard and was drowned, as he believed; how Miss Temple and I were left upon the wreck, and were yet there. But the blackness of a densely foggy night was now upon the sea; it was also blowing hard, and nothing could be done till the weather cleared and the day broke.

That nothing was done, you know. When the horizon was penetrable, keen eyes were despatched to the mastheads; but whether it was that the light wreck had drifted to a degree entirely out of the calculations of Sir Edward Panton, or that his own drift during the long, black, blowing hours misled him, no sign of us rewarded his search. For two days he gallantly stuck to those

waters, then abandoned the hunt as a hopeless one, and proceeded on his voyage to England.

Mr. Colledge on his arrival immediately thought it his duty to write what he could tell of the fate of Miss Temple to Lady Temple's brother, General Ashmole. The General was a little in a hurry to communicate with poor Lady Temple. His activity as a bearer of ill tidings might perhaps have found additional animation in the knowledge that if Miss Temple were dead, then the next of her kinsfolk to whom her ladyship must leave the bulk of her property would be the General and his four charming daughters. Be this as it will, the news proved fatal to Lady Temple. The uncertainty of her daughter's fate, doubt of the possibility of her having been rescued from the wreck, fears of her having met with a slow, miserable, most dreadful death, preyed upon such poor remains of health as paralysis and a long term of motionless confinement had left her; and her maid one morning on entering her room found her dead in her bed.

The shock was a terrible one to Louise. Again and again she had said to me that if the news of her having been lost out of the Indiaman reached her mother before she arrived home, it would kill her. And now she found her prediction verified! I was a deal grieved for the girl's sake; but it was not a thing for me to take very seriously to heart. Indeed it was not long before I got to hear that her ladyship had been an exceedingly ambitious woman, with the highest possible notions of her own importance, and of an insufferable condescension of manner; and I was assured, had she lived, I should have found her a formidable, perhaps an immovable, obstacle to my marriage. But had she been the most amiable of women, the stroke of her death must have been considerably softened to my mind by understanding that it made Louise the absolute mistress of a mansion and large grounds and a clear income of three thousand five hundred a year. This was very well, and quite worth being shipwrecked and kidnapped for.

But if her ladyship's death cleared the road for me in one way, it temporarily blocked it for me in another by enforcing delay. Louise must not now marry for a year. No; anything less than a year was out of the question. It would be an insult to the memory of an adored parent even to think of happiness under a twelvemonth. I resigned myself in silence to the affliction of waiting, leaving it to time to unsettle her resolution. She had many relatives, and she went from house to house; but I was never very far off. I loved her too fondly to lose her. I had won her, and I meant to have and hold the supreme title to her that had come to me from old ocean. Not that I had a doubt of her own devotion; I was afraid of her relatives. Some of them were titled people; they were all of them social star-gazers, with their intellectual eyes rooted upon objects that shone more splendidly than they and higher in life's atmosphere; and there was such an army of them in one shape or

another, such battalions of uncles and aunts, of cousins and connections spreading out like the tendrils of creepers, that I feared their influence if I did not take care to keep hovering close by to guard my Louise's heart against any relaxation of sentiment.

Indeed, I was uneasy till I got her down to my mother's house, and I could fill a volume in describing the manœuvring I was forced into to accomplish so simple a matter against the devices and stratagems of her superior connections. Already there was one young man dying of love for her. He was the eldest son of a baronet, and his mother was one of the most intriguing old wretches that ever perplexed the wishes or confounded the respectable pleasures of her fellow-creatures. Single-handed I had to fight the battle of my love against this young man, who was dying of passion, and my lady his mother, both of them backed by a large proportion of Louise's relatives; and I say I scarcely enjoyed an hour's tranquillity of mind until I had her under my mother's roof.

By this time her grief had abated; the recollection of her past sufferings lay lightly upon her mind. We were now once more together, as we had been when at sea. She soon learned to love my gentle old mother, and was so happy that after awhile her relatives ceased in despair to attempt to coax her back to them. By that time little more than six months had elapsed since our return, and, consequently, since she had received the news of her mother's death. But our being together in constant close association from morning till night, almost as much alone as ever we had been when on the wreck, what with delightful drives, delicious hand-in-hand rambles, ended in rendering me mighty impatient, and impatience is usually importunate. I grew pressing, and one day she consented to our being married at the expiration of a fortnight.

It was much too plain a wedding for such a heroine as our adventures had made Louise, but it was her own choosing. A few intimate friends of my own family, two poor but exceedingly lady-like and well-bred cousins of her own, the vicar who joined our hands, and his homely agreeable wife—these formed the company. I sent an invitation to Mr. Colledge, against the inclination of Louise, who associated him with all our misfortunes, though for my part I could have strained him to my heart on my marriage day as the involuntary promoter of all my happiness. He neither wrote nor presented himself; but this was afterwards explained by a letter dated from Palestine, in which country he was then travelling, having made up his mind to trust himself and his fortunes as little as possible to the ocean in his determination to see the world. It was a stupid amiable letter, full of good wishes and kindest regards, with much rambling on in reference to the wreck and his own narrow escape. I observed that he did not mention the name of Miss Fanny Crawley.

An effusion of the local good-will and sympathy was visible in the decoration of the church. Never stood any man before the altar more proud of the girl of his heart's choice than did I with

Louise by my side. Beautiful she had always shown to me from the first moment of my gaze resting on her aboard the Indiaman, but never more beautiful in the eyes of my passion than on that day. The sweetness that had come to her from suffering was in every smile and look.

'We have started on another voyage now,' I whispered as we passed out of the church.

'There must be no wrecks in it,' she answered.

And for years, I thank God, it was all summer sailing with us; but I am old now, and alone.

In those times, the round voyage to India averaged a twelvemonth, and I was unable to obtain news of the *Countess Ida* until the August that had followed the June of our arrival at Liverpool in the *Greyhound*. I was in London when I heard of the Indiaman as having been reported off Deal. In the course of a few days I despatched a note to old Keeling, addressed to the East India Docks, asking him to come and dine with me, that I might tell him of my adventures, and learn what efforts he had made to recover us from the wreck. He arrived in full shore-going fig, with the old familiar skewered look, in the long, tightly buttoned-up coat, and the tall cravat and stiff collars, in which his sun-reddened face rested like a ball in a cup.

He was heartily glad to see me, and continued to shake my hand until my arm ached again. Of my story he had known nothing; for the first time he was now hearing it from my lips. He listened with acute attention, with a countenance over which expression chased expression; and when I had done, seized my hand again, and shook it long and vehemently, whilst he complimented me on my success in navigating the *Lady Blanche* to the island, and on the judgment I had shown in planning and effecting my escape from Mr. Lush and his crew.

He had little to tell me, however, that was very interesting. He had been blown away from the neighbourhood of the wreck; and though, when the weather cleared, he had luffed up to the spot where he believed she was to be found, he could see nothing of her. Mr. Prance was looking at the hull through his glass when the smother came driving down upon her, and saw the cutter shove off; and he believed that Miss Temple and I were in her. He had no time to make sure, for the vapour swiftly blotted the boat out of sight. But his conviction was—and Keeling owned himself influenced by it—that if they fell in with the wreck they would not find us aboard her. Poor old Mrs. Radcliffe nearly went crazy with grief and distress; and to satisfy her mind, he cruised over the supposed situation of the hull till the night fell; then, satisfied that we had either perished by the capsizal of the cutter, or been picked up by the corvette, he trimmed sail for his course and proceeded.

The disaster that had befallen us, he said, had cast a heavy gloom over the ship, and it was heightened by Mrs. Radcliffe's

serious illness, due to the poignant wretchedness caused her by the loss of her niece. Hemmeridge was entreated to prescribe for her, but he sullenly refused, hoped that her illness might be epidemical, that more might suffer than she, and could breathe nothing but threats of having the law of Keeling on the ship's arrival at Bombay. However, by the time the vessel was up with the Cape, Mrs. Radcliffe had recovered; and when Keeling last saw her she seemed as hopeful as she was before depairful of her niece being yet accounted for.

Abreast of the Cape also the spirits of the passengers had sufficiently lightened to enable some love-making to proceed briskly amongst them.

'Much about twenty degrees of south latitude,' said old Keeling in his dry voice, 'young Mr. Fairthorne, the fellow that lisped, you remember, Mr. Dugdale, succeeded in tempting that nice young lady, Constance Hudson, to accept his hand and heart. Old Mrs. Hudson was very well pleased, sir. About the latitude of Chagos Archipelago, Mr. Emmett induced Miss Helen Trevor to betroth herself to him. And off the Laccadive Islands, Peter Hemskirk, to the astonishment of all hands, deposited his person and his fortune at the feet of Miss Mary Joliffe.'

'I had thought Mr. Emmett was a married man,' I said.

'Apparently not, sir,' he answered.

'And your friend Hemmeridge?'

He replied that the surgeon consulted a solicitor at Bombay, and had no doubt been advised to take certain proceedings; but three weeks after the arrival of the ship the doctor had been thrown from a horse, and so injured in the spine and head that he died within a fortnight.

'What he could have done I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Dugdale,' said the old fellow. 'I believe I was within my rights. Yet he might have given me trouble, and I hate law. The two fellows, Crabb and Willett, I handed over to the police. Mr. Saunders got the drug the scoundrel had used carefully analysed, and it turned out that he was right: it proved to be what he'd termed it; and I afterwards heard the stuff was not unknown in India, where it's used for some religious purpose; but in what way I don't know.'

That was all the news that old Keeling had to give me.

When I left Lush and the sailors of the *Lady Blanche* upon the reef I had little thought of ever hearing of them again. I knew the nature of sailors. If they came off with their lives, I might be sure they would disperse and utterly vanish. Great was my surprise, then, one morning some months after my marriage, to find, on opening my morning newspaper, a column-long account of the trial of a seaman named Lush for the murder of a man named Woodward. The evidence was substantially my story with a sequel to it. The witnesses against Lush were three of the seamen of the

Lady Blanche. The counsel for the prosecution related the adventures of the barque down to the time of my swimming off to her and sailing away with her. The boat had been in charge of the man Woodward when I detached the line to let her slip away. He had fallen into a deep sleep, overcome by fatigue and drink. The yells and roaring of the crew, one of whom had started up and observed the boat drifting out, had aroused the sleeper after the uproar had been some time continued. He was thick and stupid, went clumsily to work to scull the heavy boat ashore, and was a long time in doing it. The carpenter dragged him on to the beach and asked him if he had fallen asleep. The unfortunate wretch answered yes; the carpenter struck him fiercely; Woodward returned the blow; and, mad with rage, Lush whipped out his sheath-knife and stabbed the man to the heart.

By this time the barque had almost faded out in the gloom of the night. Pursuit was not to be thought of. They waited till daylight: but instead of putting their remaining provisions and water in the boat and heading away in search of land or a passing ship, the fools fell to digging afresh; and it was not until their little stock of water was almost gone that, being satisfied that there was no gold in that part of the shore where Captain Braine had said it lay hidden, they put to sea.

They were several days afloat before they, or at least the survivors, were rescued. Their sufferings were not to be expressed. They had been five days without water when picked up. Four of them had died, and one of the bodies had been preserved for a use that cannot be dwelt on. They were fallen in with by an English brig bound home, to the captain of which one of the sailors, who had been an old 'chum' of Woodward, told the story of the murder of that man by Lush. The skipper, not choosing to have such a ruffian as the carpenter at large in his little ship, clapped him in irons, and kept him under hatches until the arrival of the vessel in the Thames, when he was handed over to the police. I hardly wished the scoundrel hanged, richly as he deserved making such an ending; and it was with something of relief that I read when he was brought to the Old Bailey that the jury had found a verdict of manslaughter, and that he was sentenced to ten years' transportation.

To this hour I am puzzled by Captain Braine and his island. My wife uniformly believed that the gold was there, and that the poor lunatic had mistaken the bearings of the spot where it lay. My own fancy, however, always inclined to this: that from the circumstance of his having rightly described the island, which he situated on a part of the sea where no reef or land of any sort was laid down on the charts, he had actually been wrecked upon it, and suffered as he had related to me; that by long dwelling upon his terrific experience he had imported certain insane fancies into it out of his unsuspected madness when it grew upon him: until the

hallucination of the gold hardened in his poor soul into a conviction. Yet I may be wrong; and, if so, then there must at this hour be upwards of a hundred and eighty thousand pounds' worth of gold coins lying concealed somewhere in the reef whose latitude and longitude you have.

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Thoughts, like Snowflakes on some far-off Mountain Side, go on accumulating till some great Truth is loosened, and falls like an Avalanche on the Waiting World.

Erasmus Wilson said: 'Remember that the Skin is AN EVERTED LUNG.'

A man may be guilty of many things contrary to his physical well-being, but if he will take care of his skin he will not suffer so much.

'I am satisfied that three-fourths of the Disease to which man is subject are attributable to the pores of the skin being stopped up.'—Dr. ROLT.

A glance at the above facts must be sufficient to convince anyone that disease and debility go hand-in-hand with neglect of the skin. It may be a silent process, this choking of twenty-eight miles of drain-pipes, but it is none the less sure, and no one can calculate the number of thousands of human beings that are destroyed annually by such *wilful neglect.*

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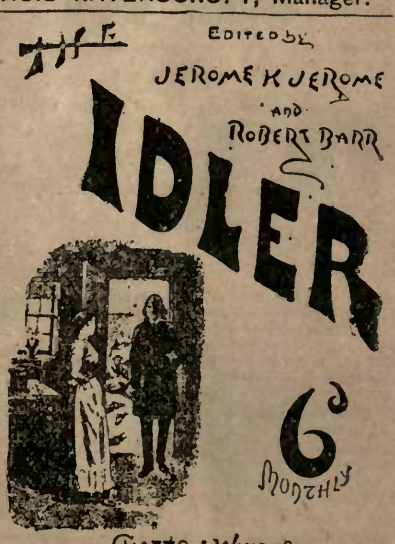

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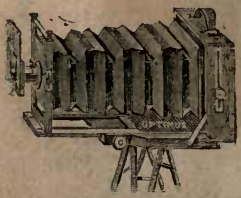

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